

**VICTORY
TO THE
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WHEN BUSH AND BLAIR WAGE WAR

DEFEND

IRAQ

**LET'S
WAGE
WAR
ON
THEM**

AGAINST

US/UK

ATTACK



Lies about asylum at the heart of hysteria

By George Binette, secretary, Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers

This is the diary of a Macedonian. He went to Britain in the back of a lorry... Will he find a two-bar heater waiting for him in two rooms/Above the cut-rate telephone anywhere place? Oiling the grinding city underside/Treating each flake of rust all over Humberside" - Joe Strummer, *Shaktar Donestsk*.

Hardly a day goes by without a front-page tabloid branding asylum seekers as "criminals", "scroungers" and now "terrorists".

If you swallowed the tales marketed by the likes of *The Mail*, *Express*, *The Sun* and *Star*, you might well believe that thousands of cloven-hoofed Algerians were busily building ricin factories across Britain's cities, with generous handouts from the Benefits Agency.

Then there is the inevitable front-page lead in *The Mail on Sunday* claiming that asylum seekers have displaced an "88-year-old widow" from the patients' register at the local GP's surgery.

Such attempts to fuel hysteria about asylum seekers spur Tory and New Labour politicians to bid ever higher in a "Dutch auction" to see which party can take the most vicious line on asylum seekers. Tony Blair appears on Sunday morning television insisting that his government is prepared to scrap Britain's commitment to the 1951 Geneva Convention on refugee rights.

The Tories' shadow home secretary, Oliver Letwin, counters two days later with a call to detain indefinitely all new asylum applicants until the security services have completed checks on potential terrorist links. And so it goes on with politicians reinforcing the images projected by the press.

And then home secretary and New Labour's racist-in-chief David Blunkett makes a speech about the "coiled spring" of hatred for refugees to justify his latest legal attack on them.

Little wonder, then, that a recent Mori poll showed that many people think that nearly a quarter of all the world's refugees are in Britain and that for 64 per cent of those surveyed the phrase most commonly associated with the term asylum seeker was "illegal immigrant".

The Sun would have us believe that refugees coming to Britain see this "as the land of milk and honey" for which they will gladly risk life and limb. In reality, a single adult receives a basic support package worth only £38 a week - a mere 70 per cent of income support. Joint research by Oxfam and the Refugee Council indicates that more than 80 per cent of those on such basic packages are unable to afford shoes and clothing, with a similar proportion going hungry at least once a week.

But the British media rarely even con-



siders the sort of desperation that drives an individual or family to risk suffocation concealed in the back of a lorry crossing the Channel to Dover or to chance horrific injuries while clinging in pitch darkness to the undercarriage of a speeding train.

Most of us assume that the vast majority of refugees come from countries in what was once deemed the Third World. In fact, some 86 per cent of an estimated 12 million refugees world-wide do indeed come from less economically developed countries. Of those 12 million, nearly nine million have sought refuge elsewhere in the Third World. In any given year between 1 and 2 per cent of the world's refugees come to Britain and less than a fifth come to any European Union country. The refugee populations of Pakistan and Iran alone account for nearly 3.2 million people. In both cases many of these people have fled from Afghanistan.

Tony Blair never ceases to remind us of our good fortune at living in the fourth richest country in the world, yet compared to population Britain ranks only 32nd in terms of the number of refugees it take in. The country that takes the highest numbers of refugees, relative to the size of the existing population is Guinea (population seven million), which has afforded shelter to some 500,000 refugees - most of them victims of the prolonged civil war in neighbouring Sierra Leone.

What fuels these wars in the most impoverished nations of the world? Of course, there are many factors, including how the western powers imposed boundaries on their former colonial possessions. But a crucial cause is poverty itself. This is also a driving force to immigration internationally.

What the tabloid editors don't reveal is that some 60 countries have seen their gross domestic products per head of population

fall in real terms over the course of the past 20 years. Such dramatic economic decline in no small measure reflects the impact of austerity packages devised by the financial institutions of global capital such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

The combination of poverty, war and brutal repression propels global migration - albeit largely within the Third World. At the same time these factors collide with Fortress Europe's ever tighter immigration controls to create a role for the "people traffickers" who exploit the vulnerable people desperate to escape from persecution or bloodshed, or just to the prospect of a better life.

The same politicians in Western Europe such as Blair, Silvio Berlusconi and José-Maria Aznar, who champion the free movement of capital and are the most ardent advocates of war against Iraq also happen to figure among those who want to junk international treaty commitments to refugees. They want to make it even harder to enter Europe freely if you come from the "wrong" place or have the "wrong" skin colour.

These politicians are among the most sickening of hypocrites once it becomes apparent that their own policies have actually strengthened the drive to migrate and they are simply blaming the victims of capitalist globalisation. Against them we argue that control of immigration invariably proves racist and chauvinist. It affords people scapegoats for the failings of the system in the more affluent west, while undermining the huge potential for unity among working people internationally.

That's why we say all immigration controls must go and why the defence of refugees in Britain is a cause for all those who are opposed to tackling the root causes of the coming war against Iraq.

Police clampdown will do nothing to stop gun crime

The tragic deaths of two Birmingham teenagers, caught in the crossfire at a new year's party, reignited the panic over gun crime in Britain. Media pundits, politicians and academics rushed forward with explanations and solutions. The home secretary imposed new visa restrictions on people from Jamaica.

Much of the establishment's rage was, of course, tinged with racism, with black rap music being singled out as the "cause" of gun crime.

Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir John Stevens, the UK's top police officer, believes that there should be more custodial sentences. His justification - in his own words - "we should learn from America where there are millions of people in jail - they believe prison works". With perverse logic like this it's no wonder that the police and government have got it hopelessly wrong on gun crime.

The last Tory government outlawed handguns in early 1997 after the Dunblane school massacre. In the next five years, there has been a doubling in the number of crimes involving handguns, up from 2,636 to 5,871. Now it doesn't take a genius to work out that stopping ordinary people having legally held guns would hardly put an end to gun crime, so what is New Labour's response to the latest figures?

They had already extended the ban on .22 calibre pistols and now they're proposing tougher laws on possession of air rifles and replicas. Also under consideration is a new five-year sentence for possession of a firearm in a public place.

At the same time as there is a supposed crackdown on handguns the number of armed police on our streets has continued to increase. The Metropolitan force has upped the number of armed officers by 40 and the number of armed response vehicles from six to 10, with another 120 officers to be redeployed to support them. Presumably, they will be better trained than the "experts" who shot Harry Stanley on the streets of Hackney for possessing a chair leg in a plastic bag.

The simple truth is that none of these measures will do anything to reduce the level of gun crime, which has begun to blight everyday life for residents in some inner city areas. New Labour may still want to prove that it's "tough on crime", but it hasn't done anything about the underlying causes of crime.

Obviously, the reality is far more complicated than a simple "drugs problem" solution that the law and order lobby always cite. The government's own figures do show that gun violence is heavily concentrated in a small number of big city police forces, notably the Met, Greater Manchester and West Midlands areas. In short gun crime is predominantly in urban areas of greatest social deprivation, where much of a generation of

predominantly black youth, has been abandoned - high unemployment, low-paid jobs, crumbling services and terrible housing. Nationally, unemployment rates for men of African-Caribbean origin are more than twice that in the white population.

Given such circumstances it is hardly surprising that some youth have sought a quick way out by joining gangs or doing drugs. They are not driven by "evil" as Blair and Blunkett claim, but by real, material factors. They enter a world of mounting violence where the use of guns is increasingly seen as necessary. On the one hand, the drug gangs need firearms to control their corner of the crack or heroin markets. On the other hand, desperate crack addicts are now using guns to carry out robberies to feed their habits. Contrary to New Labour's culture minister, Kim Howells, none of this derives from watching a video by So Solid Crew.

Further proof that gun crime is much more about deprivation than gun ownership comes from international comparisons. For example, the levels of gun ownership in Canada are broadly similar to those in the USA, yet the amount of gun-related crime, including homicides, is much lower in Canada, which has more social welfare spending and a less unequal distribution of wealth. In Switzerland, one of the richest nations in the world in per capita terms, gun ownership is almost a legal requirement. But when did you last read of a spate of drive-by shootings in the street of Zurich?

There is no single easy answer to the apparent growth of gun crime in Britain's inner cities. One thing is certain, however: no new law will stop people who are desperate due to alienation or addiction from getting and using guns.

Moreover, having the racist police force armed to the teeth, while ordinary citizens are legally barred from owning guns, is a blatantly undemocratic set up. Their side has a monopoly of guns - which are all too frequently used to kill innocent people - while we are denied the right to have any access to arms at all.

Instead of more laws on the statute books and ever greater police powers, we need an end to the criminalisation of drug users and to fight for the legalisation of all drugs, not just cannabis. This can undercut the criminal element and remove the lethal struggles over the market that take place.

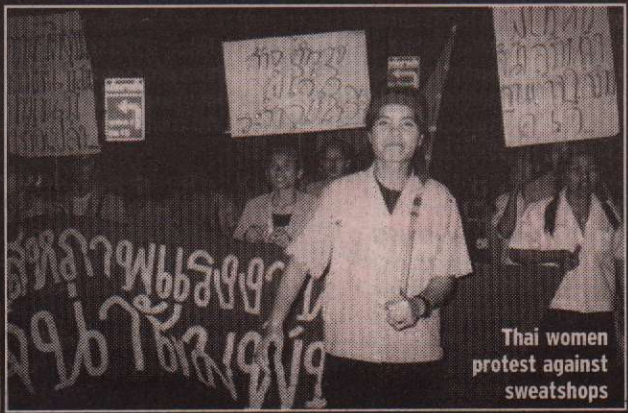
At the same time, there is a desperate need for a massive programme of public investment in new housing and infrastructure that is developed with the active involvement of the local communities, with jobs at union rates. Anything less and we are bound to see still more funerals for black teenagers gunned down on the streets of Britain's cities.

RECLAIM INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

A CALL FOR AN INTERNATIONAL DAY OF ACTION AGAINST SWEATSHOP LABOUR, MARCH 8TH.

The labour movement must reclaim international women's day as a day of protest and action across the continents. Therefore we appeal to all anti-sweatshop and workers' rights organisations, women's organisations, trade unions, NGOs, human rights campaigns, refugee organisations and other interested campaigns to support the call, create action committees and come together to plan protests and events to mark this day. The aim is for actions or events in every city and country across Europe, to create a prominent wave of worldwide protest. Contact us at:

www.nosweat-uk.org



Thai women protest against sweatshops

WORKERS POWER MEETINGS

SHEFFIELD: Which way forward for the the Middle East. Tuesday 18 February, 7.30pm Rutland Arms, Brown Street. Contact 07752 627 753 for details

SOUTH LONDON: Defend Iraq, Free Palestine. Thursday 13 February, 7.30pm Stephen Lawrence Room, Student's Union, Goldsmith's University, New Cross SE14. Contact 0207 820 1363

Firefighters' dispute: which way forward?

Workers Power spoke to Matt Wrack, regional organiser for the London region of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) about the latest developments in the firefighters' strike

WP: The dispute has been off the boil now for some time. How do you see it getting its momentum back?

MW: The cancellation of the strike just before Christmas and the long break did lead to a loss of momentum and took the wind out of the sails of the campaign a little bit, which is one of the reasons why the London region didn't agree with the cancellation. We supported carrying on although in a different format. The mood hasn't been as upbeat as it was before Christmas. That's partly because people have realised that this is a very serious struggle. But people have been more than willing to take strike action and to continue with it, and are now beginning to get stuck back into the campaign again.

What do you think the best tactics for the strike are now? Do you think there should be an all-out strike?

I think the biggest problem with the strike tactics has been the issue of cancellation. It's almost as though the threat of strike action has been considered as enough to bring the employers to the negotiating table. Obviously we need a bit more than just bringing them to the negotiating table. My own region's view is that we should have had a longer period of escalation, beginning with 24-hour strikes but escalating over a period of time towards longer strikes. Part of the problem was the second strike we took was eight days, fairly lengthy, and as a response to that the executive council have moved to shorter duration strikes. There are a number of members – though it is very much a minority – now arguing for an all-out strike. I think the problem with that is that members would have to feel that it was clearly a strike aiming at a rapid victory. And that would mean a lot more than us just calling an all-out strike. The members would have to know that the movement was mobilising behind them. So at the moment, it is very much a minority view in favour of an all-out strike though that may change as things develop.

Do you think Prescott's move to try and get control of negotiations through new laws will harden the mood among firefighters?

Prescott's move has definitely hardened attitudes on the picket lines and in the branches. It is seen clearly as an attack on our negotiating rights and on how the fire service has determined pay for 50 years or so. It is also an attack on local democracy and an attempt to centralise control in the hands of the government. One thing it does highlight is that the propaganda was effective. We had all that propaganda before Christmas that the two strikes were not effective and that the army more than coped. They produced their *Cobra Report* to back this up. And people are now saying if the strikes were so ineffective why have they now got to take these legal measures to change the rules on how we negotiate pay. It's clear that our action was effective and they now want to try and resolve the dispute on their terms. It is cost-

The Agitator says ...

Andy Gilchrist, a member of the "awkward squad", the new generation of left union leaders, has vacillated between militancy and meekness during the fire dispute.

Before Christmas the FBU strike had the government on the run. The public overwhelmingly supported the strikers. Fellow trade unionists, especially on the London tube, eagerly took action in solidarity with the firefighters. The government was on the ropes, Bruiser Prescott made a total fool of himself by refusing to get out of bed to look at the details of an offer the bosses had made to avert the strike.

This was the perfect time to press home the advantage, step up the action, spread the solidarity and deliver the knockout punch to New Labour's union-busting plans. Instead, on the promise of nothing, Andy Gilchrist defused the struggle and joined in with the futile Acas roadshow. He thus sowed confusion and demoralisation among his members.

The only people delighted with this were the cabinet, the TUC leaders desperate to avoid a conflict and the employers. Two months on, the FBU are now facing a government determined to impose a 4 per cent pay deal, slash the service and attack the working conditions of firefighters. Prescott is on the offensive once again, threatening emergency legislation that would – in effect – prevent the FBU from taking strike action.

Meanwhile the on and off strikes are back. But there is no sense of a deadly struggle to prevent any cuts in jobs and the fire service. With Andy Gilchrist running the show there are likely to be more cancellations, and secret negotiations. The rank and file need to take the initiative and organise a campaign to:

- Build a national strike committee to take control of the dispute and to oversee the negotiations.
- Fight for a recall conference of the union to hammer out a new strike strategy and, if necessary, a new claim.
- Fight for solidarity from other unions – meeting Prescott's strike breaking threats, if he tries to imple-

ing them money – £70 million so far and £1 million a day even when we are not on strike. The insurance companies are not happy about the government's proposals for changing fire cover. The insurance companies have lost a lot of money. All of this shows that our strike action was definitely effective.

Prescott's move upped the political stakes, and the threat of war with Iraq is doing this as well. What do you think the political implications of the strike are?

It has become a very political dispute. It was a political issue from the start – the government's policy on public sector pay. Interestingly on the war I think there has been a very rapid shift of opinion among firefighters. It's raised on every picket line. There's very much a mood, along with the rest of the country, against the war. But also in the firefighters' case they are linking it with the dispute on two questions:

- First on the question of cost, people are pointing out that the government can find the money to go bombing Iraq but can't find the money to find a settlement to our dispute. One figure I saw recently was that it would cost £3.5 billion within a matter of

weeks for a war on Iraq. To meet our full claim would cost £30 million a year – a fraction of the cost of a war on Iraq

- The second issue it raises is the question of democracy. We believe – and public opinion polls back this up – that the public overwhelmingly support the firefighters' case for improved pay and they don't support cuts in the service. Yet the politicians are steaming ahead with proposals to attack the fire service and are not going to give us a decent pay rise. Firefighters are linking this with the question of the war. A majority of people don't want a war. The government seems intent on going ahead with it against the wishes and the interests of the majority of the population.

All of this has brought to the fore the question of the political fund [money currently paid by the union to the Labour Party]. Democratising the political fund is a debate that has been raging in the FBU for six or seven years now. I think that if our conference goes ahead – which has unfortunately at the present time been postponed – there will undoubtedly be a big debate and I think there is a very good chance of major changes in relation to the political fund. I

ment them, with strike action across the trade union movement since it will be an attack on the negotiating rights of the whole movement.

The key question now, given the lull in the dispute and the likely pressure the FBU leaders will come under if a war on Iraq starts, is how to win the strike: how to get, at an absolute minimum, a 16 per cent rise with no strings. Above all it is vital to stop the modernisation plans that will mean massive cuts for the service and open the way to privatisation.

In the interview, Matt Wrack spells out the problem of simply calling an all-out strike tomorrow. But with the members kept in uncertainty about future strikes, with the proposals for an extended period of guerrilla strikes that could prolong the dispute rather than resolve it, and with the threat of war looming, the time has come, it seems to us, to raise the call for an all out strike.

To win this call we would have to win pledges of solidarity from other workers; we would have to formulate a clear and winnable goal – in terms of pay and defence of the service; we would have to set in place strike organisations, backed by strike support committees, in every station and region; we would have to publicise and argue the case for an all-out strike in every publication of the union and in special strike bulletins.

If we do this we can win the members over to an all-out strike and we can, through such a strike, show the government and the bosses that the FBU, with the backing of thousands upon thousands of other workers, is determined to win.

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Victory to the fire fighters!



things have happened since then and we feel we need a recall of the conference to debate democratically where we are, the way forward and how the strike should be run from now on.

And what about the role of the TUC?

The TUC's role has not been satisfactory in the eyes of a lot of members. The TUC should be organising support – financial, political and industrial. What they seem intent on doing is simply getting us back to the so-called negotiating table at Acas. That seems to be the main aim of the TUC leadership. It was the TUC who seem to have got Acas involved. It was Acas involvement that led to the cancellation of the strikes before Christmas and far from leading to an improved offer as the leadership seemed to believe was going to happen it has led to the worst offer we have received since these discussions began last May. As one of our reps put it at a recent meeting: "Every time we have cancelled a strike the other side have come back with a worse offer." So I think there is a lot of scepticism about the role of the TUC. Nevertheless the TUC does have an obligation to organise support and we will continue to call for that support.

What initiatives are rank and file firefighters taking at the moment?

One of the problems I mentioned earlier was that the only national forum until recently was the executive council. There have been two meetings of officials from around the country, which was undoubtedly a step forward but again they weren't decision-making bodies and they weren't on a properly representative basis. But one thing that is needed is a debate between different sections of the union, and different brigades and regions about the way forward. One proposal we have discussed in London, and agreed and are now organising is for a solidarity conference aimed at other trade unionists where they can come and discuss with us the implications of our dispute and the attacks on the unions by the Labour government and how they can organise solidarity in all its forms – financial, political and industrial.

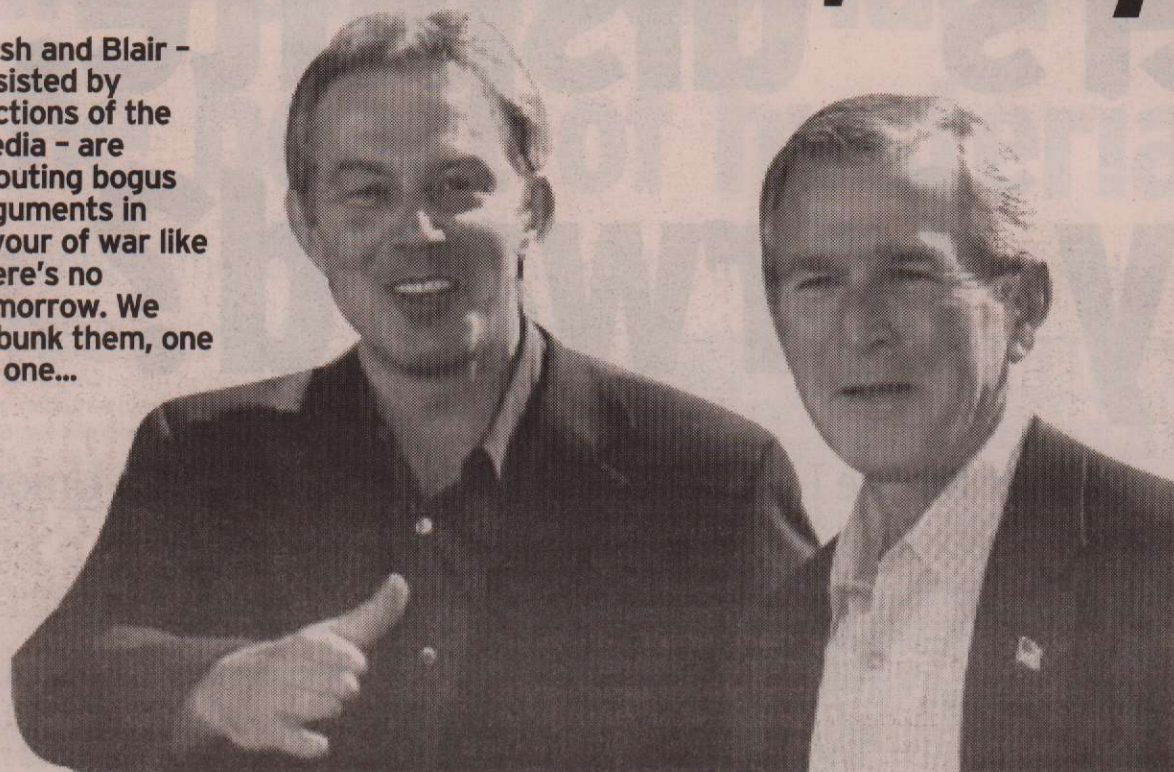
A Conference for Trade Unionists Solidarity With the Firefighters

Saturday 1 March
 The Camden
 Centre, London
 11.00am
 Called by London
 Region of the FBU



Tell us another, Tony

Bush and Blair - assisted by sections of the media - are spouting bogus arguments in favour of war like there's no tomorrow. We debunk them, one by one...



A war for human rights?

The US and UK are in no position to lecture anyone else about human rights. The UK government is planning to detain thousands of asylum seekers - some of them fleeing from the chaos and devastation of the Middle East. The US has been holding prisoners from the Afghan war in appalling condition in Guantanamo Bay breaking all international codes on prisoners of war.

Saddam Hussein is indeed a dictator who has tortured his opponents, gassed enemy Iranian troops and his own Kurdish population. He was kept in power through the 1980s by US and UK military and business support. In 1983 Donald Rumsfeld, now chief hawk in Washington, visited Baghdad promising loans and credits to Saddam. This was backed up by US National Security Directive 114. Four years later, the US administration turned a blind eye to the gassing of Kurds.

Meanwhile, the US and UK prop up the murderous Israeli regime and have now started to make friendly gestures towards Iran, which 12 months ago had pariah status in Washington.

Kurdish territory in northern Iraq has already been entered by US troops. There is no way the Kurds - who want self-government - will be allowed autonomy.

A war on terrorism?

Saddam Hussein is head of a secular regime. The al-Qaeda network headed by Osama bin Laden is committed to setting up Islamic states with Sharia law. They hate the Iraqi regime. The western powers are scrabbling around to find proof of a direct connection between Saddam and al-Qaeda but after a year of assertion they have come up with such devastating evidence as an al-Qaeda supporter getting medical treatment in Iraq.

The truth is that the pro-war pressure groups in the US have used the events of 9/11 to get support for their plans for "regime change" in Iraq. In fact the war is more likely to cause terrorist attacks than prevent them - not because a devastated Iraqi regime will fund them but

because hundreds of dispossessed Iraqis and other Arabs will, in desperation, turn to Islamist groups.

A war for democracy?

Even the White House has stopped pretending that the US invasion will bring democracy. The "regime change" they talk of will mean replacing a bloody dictator - Saddam Hussein - with a military occupation by around 100,000 troops and an imposed US puppet. If they can find Iraqi military chiefs to launch a coup, then they will let them have a role. Otherwise, their preferred candidate is Ahmed Chalabi, a member of a rich Iraqi family and convicted fraudster - found guilty of embezzlement from the Petra Bank in Jordan.

A war on WMD?

The people bringing weapons of mass destruction (WMD) to Iraq will be the invaders. Saddam Hussein certainly did possess biological and chemical weapons. After the defeat of Iraq by the US in 1991, inspectors were sent in to oversee the removal not only of those weapons, but most heavy weaponry. Ex-CIA operative and member of the inspectors team, Scott Ritter, has shown that after ten years of sanctions, Iraq is in no position to launch long-range attacks. Meanwhile the International Atomic Energy Authority stated in November 2002 that "We have to date found no evidence that Iraq has revived its nuclear weapons programme".

If there are any remnants of weapons of mass destruction, then, according to the testimony of CIA chief George Tenet, the probability of them being used in the foreseeable future is "extremely low" except in a desperate last stand against attack. The CIA should know. It provided Saddam with the weapons in the first place.

A war against 'proliferation'?

Although there is no connection between al-Qaeda and Baghdad and Iraq has no meaningful weapons of mass destruction, if the US and UK were serious about this threat they

would start with Pakistan and Russia. Pakistan has nuclear weapons, tried and tested and it has threatened to use them. Al-Qaeda operates openly in villages and towns on Pakistan's border with Afghanistan, with the acquiescence of recently elected regional officials who are pro-Taliban.

Even then al-Qaeda is more likely to get their hands on them through states or governments, but by stealing them or buying them on the open market.

Thousands of Russian military scientists and technicians are unemployed and there are plans to lay off many more. These people are short of money. Over the past decade there have been 18 incidents involving the seizure of stolen highly enriched uranium or plutonium.

In Russia there are more than 20,000 nuclear warheads sitting in 120 separate nuclear weapons storage sites. Hundreds of tons of bomb-making equipment are dispersed throughout Russia's network of nuclear facilities.

Nearly two million rounds of nerve agents are housed in a decaying chemical weapons store at Shchuchye in Russia's Kurgan region. The artillery shells are small enough to fit in a briefcase and each one has enough lethal doses to kill 100,000 people.

A war to back up UN resolutions?

It's the other way round. The UN has been bullied into backing up the war drive. The US uses its economic and military might to push others into line. And even then it ignores the bits of resolutions it doesn't like. The previous resolution on Iraq, Resolution 687, which imposed sanctions and inspection on Iraq, also called for the removal of all weapons of mass destruction from the Middle East.

Never mind the arsenal kept by the American fleet, what about the 40 nuclear warheads kept by Israel?

In the words of Dennis Halliday, former UN Assistant Secretary General, "We have a UN security council out of control. A Council corrupted by the US...and undermined by the veto power of the five permanent members".

Revolt shake

By *Kuldip Balwa*, national steering committee of the Stop the War Coalition

The anti-war movement is growing all over the world. And everywhere it is winning the arguments.

Last month a poll showed that just 13 per cent of people in Britain will support Blair in backing a war without a UN mandate. Nearly half have said they oppose war against Iraq in any circumstances.

Bush and Blair's war will be a war for oil and a war to extend US world domination, and most people know it.

In January 300,000 marched through towns and cities in the US in the biggest anti-war demonstrations since the 1970s. On 15 February, 10 million people are expected to take to the streets around the world as part of the biggest anti-war demonstrations ever witnessed.

There are, however, three dangers facing the anti-war movement.

First, it could allow itself to be split by a UN resolution backing war, as a result of bribery and bullying by Bush and Blair.

Let us be clear: if this happens it will not be because Hans Blix has found a "smoking gun", or US spy satellites have found hitherto unknown piles of weapons. It will be because Russia and France have decided that they do not want to be left aside

when it comes to dividing up the spoils of war - the lucrative oil contracts, the reconstruction work.

France and Germany have already been offered assurances over Iraqi oil. And non-permanent members of the Security Council such as Cameroon, Angola and Guinea are likely to cave in to pressure and the promise of future aid and trade deals.

In which case the idea that the anti-war movement should get off the streets because the "international community" has signed up to the war would be ridiculous. The only international community that counts is that of the world workers' movement and the growing anti-war and anti-capitalist movements which represent the tens of millions fighting for social justice and national rights.

The second danger is that when a war starts many get confused about what is at stake.

Many opponents of the war will switch sides, saying that we must support "our boys". Union leaders and Labour dissidents will be susceptible to the mass patriotic fervour as the anti-war movement is accused of undermining the war effort.

They will say: "we did not want the

Oil key to US

According to Tony Blair, it's got nothing to do with oil, writes *Frank Kellermann*.

If it were about oil, he told parliament: "it would be infinitely simpler to cut a deal with Saddam, who would ... be delighted to give us access to as much oil as we wanted if he could carry on building weapons of mass destruction. The very reason why we are taking the action we are taking has nothing to do with oil or any of the other conspiracy theories put forward."

But in Washington there is an intense debate going on about Iraq's oil. Because Iraq's economy is 90 per cent reliant on oil, oil matters at every level - from where the first troops attack to who forms the stogie Iraqi government after the last shot is fired.

Colin Powell announced that Iraq's oil would be "held in trust for the Iraqi people". But the US hawks want the industry privatised, broken up and handed to the Kurdish, Shia and émigré Sunni Iraqi leaders. They want it put back on stream at breakneck speed, whipped into producing six million barrels per day as soon as possible - and the revenue used to pay forced reparations, UN fines and - no doubt - for a wholesale re-equipment of the post-

Saddam Iraqi army with US hardware.

Whoever wins, this argument is premised on the fact that the USA will be in control of Iraqi oil and have the luxury of doing what it wants with it.

That fact has alarmed the oil interests of Russia, France and China. These three permanent security council members each has a veto over UN-backed military action. And each has a strategic commitment to Iraqi oil. The French company TotalFinaElf has two big contracts pencilled in. Russian oil company Stroitransgas - often described as the "privatised oil ministry" - flew into Baghdad in January to sign two more. China, which economists say will be the economic powerhouse of 21st century growth, has noticed it is short of oil on current projections and has the biggest production sharing contract with Baghdad - valued at \$1.3billion.

So the three powers that could veto an attack on Iraq within the Security Council have a lot to lose from America winning. Ahmed Chalabi, head of the pro-US Iraqi National Congress told the Washington Post: "American companies will have a big shot at Iraqi oil." But if you are relying on naked imperialist self-interest to force the French, Russians and Chinese to resist,

that will the world

war to start but we must wait until it is over before fighting to unseat our leaders."

Wrong, dead wrong. The war is the moment of truth. When the two imperialist powers engage in fighting we must take sides and back Iraq. We must focus mass resentment at any casualties on Blair and Bush for sacrificing lives for the profits of the oil companies.

A victory for Iraq, even under the leadership of Saddam Hussein, will be an enormous blow to the USA's ambitions for unfettered global power. The immense relief that will be felt by millions across the Middle East, Asia and Africa will be followed by an enormous sense of self-belief that the masses can organise and resist oppression and exploitation at home against their own home-grown dictators, as well as against the bullying corporate tyrants and their political leaders in Washington and London.

Such a victory over imperialism will boost the struggle of the Palestinians and give impetus to all those fighting exploitation, oppression and poverty around the world.

In Britain, it will weaken the Blair government. It will be a victory for the firefighters and anybody else fighting against low pay and redundancies, against the privatisation drive and against cuts in education, health, housing and welfare.

The third danger is we don't take our own potential seriously.

The 15 February demos will be huge, unprecedented. But this government will try to spin it out of existence and move on. The day after the real work begins, in each workplace, each school, each town.

Mass action, strikes and civil disobedience will all be needed. Rail workers in Motherwell recently refused to move a freight train carrying ammunition destined for the British military in the Gulf in a conscious political protest against being "part of a murderous war".

The train drivers' Aslef union branch passed a resolution "totally opposed to any conflict with Iraq and the USA's seemingly headlong rush into war." The resolution ended and, "finally that we, as a trade union and individually, take every opportunity to oppose this conflict".

The action of the Motherwell drivers highlights the pivotal position of the unions and rank and file trade unionists to scupper Blair's war plans. The recent Stop the War Coalition conference in London agreed to build the anti-war movement in the trade unions as a priority.

We also need street blockades and banner drops, we should refuse to handle goods and services dedicated to the war effort. Workplaces should strike the moment the fighting starts.

If we can't win a strike get some other form of protest going at work. And it will all be more effective if unions build direct

links with their European counterparts and in particular those in Italy like COBAS and some representatives of the CGIL who have pledged political strike action in the event of war.

College and university students should occupy administration and teaching buildings if the war starts. School students should demand discussion of the war in assemblies and collectively walk out when the bombs drop on Baghdad.

Let's turn every education establishment into a nerve centre of anti-war activity, hosting forums and teach-ins to build the movement. Students and youth will have an opportunity on 15 February demo to join a huge youth anti-war contingent and build links to plan co-ordinated action for when the war starts.

Acts of civil disobedience and direct action that take the fight to the air bases, the army barracks and recruitment centres can weaken the resolve of British soldiers to fight and show there is an alternative. Already some Muslim soldiers have said they will refuse to serve in the Gulf if called up and the anti-war movement must support them.

The working class and the youth have the power to stop this war. By waging war on the warmongers we can win the argument once and for all, and take a huge step towards ridding the world of the capitalist cowboys who run it.

global domination

do not get your hopes up: all three signed Resolution 1441. According to Michael Renner of the WorldWatch, "It is likely that backroom understandings among the council's major powers about the future of Iraqi oil were part of the political minutiae that finally led to the unanimous adoption of the resolution."

The likely outcome is that US firms will get the rich pickings of oil contracts reliant on hi-tech engineering, while there'll be enough low-tech work to go around among the Chinese and Russians, with the French having a slice of the pie commensurate with how much last-minute ass licking Chirac does to the Americans in the UN.

But the USA is not just playing for oil contracts. There are two strategic considerations at work in US policy. The first is its stated energy policy, drafted in 2000 by vice-president Dick Cheney. According to the document National Energy Policy, "US energy and economic security are directly linked".

While the USA wants to become less reliant on oil in the long term, it is heavily reliant for the next 10 years. For Tony Blair to suggest that problem could be solved by "doing a deal with Saddam", even ironically, reveals a poodle-sized grasp of

international relations.

Saddam's regime is a threat to America's oil security: it cuts off a vital source of supply (the USA had to buy Iraqi oil all through November-December to replenish its military oil stocks for the war); it threatens the most vital sources, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, and it is the living symbol of the altered balance of power between oil producing and consuming nations since the 1970s. Hence it is both as logical as it is unjust for the USA to focus its aggression on Iraq. Logical, because a US victory in Iraq will bring about a stunning reversal of the oil politics of the region, and indeed the world. A US victory will allow Iraq's oil industry to begin producing its full OPEC quota. That in itself will put downward pressure on the high oil price.

Secondly, even if Iraq's oil industry is kept nationalised, the opportunity to make billions of dollars will be thrown open to the oil companies of the major powers.

Ultimately the American right has OPEC in its sights. OPEC is the living embodiment of the victories of third world nationalism in the 1970s. It might be made up of craven corrupt regimes - as in Saudi Arabia, Nigeria and formerly Venezuela - but

these regimes have independent bargaining power in the world thanks to their control of their own oil, and their ability to use that to keep the price higher than the west would like.

Taking control of Iraq will put the second biggest oil reserves in the hands of America: effectively America will have a seat at OPEC - which is a bit like a fox having a place reserved in a chicken coop. It will use increased oil production in Iraq to weaken and ultimately destroy OPEC and pave the way to re-colonising the world's strategic resource.

This economic battle is ultimately being fought out for political ends: so that America can control the world politically, not just its natural resources.

Tony Blair, rapidly turning into the Forrest Gump of international diplomacy, says he can't see the oil motive at all. But the American right are more candid. With their policy institutes stuffed full of PhD-toting ex-Marines and oil bosses, they see the potential outcomes in Iraq and Afghanistan as clearly as Alexander the Great - the last great conqueror of the region - saw them. And with their laser-guided weapons they believe they are capable of living the dream.



War casts shadow over ruling class

The establishment is, surprisingly, crawling with opponents of this war, writes *Douglas Callan*. The City is paralysed with fear, shares sliding rapidly as the traders consider the worst case scenario when war breaks out.

The Royal United Services Institute - a charitable think-tank which functions as spook central in Whitehall - recently spooked host to former Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd. Behind typical British understatement, Hurd explained what's making the ruling class soil their underpants:

"A new Iraqi government installed by British and American military force and sustained by our occupying troops for months or years after a war in which many Iraqis were killed... the reaction against what would appear as imperialism rather than liberation could be destructive. We might win the war in six days, and then lose it in six months. Would we thus turn the Middle East into a set of friendly democratic capitalist societies ready to make peace with Israel, or into a region of sullen humiliation, a fertile and almost inexhaustible recruiting ground for further terrorists for whom Britain is a main target?"

Hurd warned that "doubt" about the war extends to many "loyal to Nato". In practice, half the City of London, many in big business, a fair few Tories, all Liberals and most of the Labour Party is opposed to the war. So is 83 per cent of the population.

As Labour ministers are getting ready to do photo opps in British Army camouflage, the men and women who have to wear it for a living are getting fed up as well. Army morale suffered so much in the first days of the firefighters' strike that the Chief of Defence Staff, Sir Michael Boyce, was forced to issue a public put down of defence minister Geoff Hoon, warning that the troops would not be used as strike-breakers.

Now there are other problems: more than a year ago military historian John Keegan revealed the forces were suffering morale problems because of the so called "two-tier army". In repeated deployments, Britain has relied mainly on the SAS, the Parachute Regiment and the Royal Marines, leaving the rest with the distinct impression that they are seen as a bunch of incompetent rural duffers. Now an internal army survey has revealed one in three troops believes morale is "low" - and that's before the body bags start coming back from the Gulf.

So the High Tories, the city slickers and the army - from Colonel Blimp to Tommy Atkins - are all worried about the war. What about the Labour Party? Repeated polls reveal the majority are

against the war, but there is a split between those who will grudgingly support a war as long as the UN backs it and nothing goes wrong, and the principled anti-war MPs.

At the TUC Conference in September that split was in evidence, with the right wing of the bureaucracy winning its position narrowly. The pro-Blair wing of the TUC only won because its position - unlike the position subsequently taken at the UN by Blair - said there had to be explicit support for war by the UN. Whether the bureaucrats were cynical or just suckers, the point is their position was and remains to the left of Blair.

If war breaks out without explicit UN backing then the anti-war movement will find itself operating within a much wider sea of ruling class opposition, scepticism and worry. It would be just as foolish to rely on that as to ignore it.

But ruling class opposition to the war, and the right wing of the Labour Party, cannot be relied on. In the first place - as Hurd made clear in his speech - they will "shut up and hope we are wrong" once shooting starts. It's "not cricket" to do anything otherwise. Secondly, if America delivers a crushing military victory - with members of the Iraqi middle class dancing around waving Coca Cola flags as the tanks enter Baghdad - the stock market will probably boom for a while, assuaging the worst fears of the toffs.

All this places the anti-imperialist core of the Stop the War movement in a vital position in British politics. We can win mass support for outright and unflinching opposition to the war and sideline the upper class dissenters and establishment waverers. Britain is the only country that is actually going to war where the mass of the population, and sections of the establishment, are against the war. So we have the real power to stop it. That is why - while we don't exclude the odd Baronet from marching on our demos - we don't reserve a place in the anti-war coalition for the ruling class.

The war will bring into being a mass, anti-war movement ranging from Workers Power to the *Daily Mirror*, firefighters to Labour-luvvies. It will be lucky if it can count its true supporters in parliament on more than two hands. Yet it has the power to stop the war.

If a million people march in London this month, it will be the start of a new, anti-imperialist mass movement. The challenge is to forge that movement into a permanent political force that can turn New Labour into what it really is: a rump minority of Armani-wearing con-artists with no fans anywhere but in their beloved America.

Ten reasons why th

A nationwide poll last month in Mexico found 77 per cent believed the USA was "trying to dominate the world". *Time* magazine ran a poll of more than 300,000 in Europe that showed that 84 per cent believed the USA was "the greatest threat to world peace". No wonder *The Economist* bemoaned last month: "No radio phone-in on world affairs is complete, even in friendly Britain, without callers accusing America of being reckless, bullying, unprincipled, led by a Machiavellian election-stealing dictator...and countless other accusations." And guess why? Because it's all true

1 Bush stole the Presidential election

On the day of George W Bush's inauguration on 20 January 2001, 20,000 protesters lined the route in the rain. Traditionally, the new President is meant to walk the last four blocks. But as his car pulled up the angry crowd - shouting "Hail to the Thief" - pelted his car with eggs. The limo sped away!

Out of a nation of 200 million voters, 154 million did not vote for this man. Many because they are so alienated from a system where presidential candidate who spends most on advertising wins the election. The only effective choice is between one candidate or another bought by big business.

But most of those who did vote did not vote for Bush. Al Gore received 534,000 more votes. But the President is elected by an electoral college not directly by the people. And he who wins most votes in each state has all the votes for that state. In November 2000, Florida was the key state.

There the Bush campaign chairperson - and Florida secretary of state in charge of elections - paid \$4 million to Database Technologies to remove all those suspected of being "former felons" from the electoral register. Bush's brother, the governor of Florida, agreed.

Because of the racist criminal justice system 31 per cent of all black men in Florida have been through the legal process and are deemed to have committed a felony. And 90 per cent of Florida blacks vote Democrat. In addition, thousands of blacks who had not committed any crime were removed as were those whose names or date of birth had a close match to felons.

All in all, 173,000 voters were wiped off the electoral roll, including 66 per cent of blacks in Miami-Dade county.

Result? Bush received 537 votes more than Gore in Florida.

Just to add to the conspiracy, the Fox news network declared Bush the winner in Florida before any one else and before the votes had been counted and Fox's election coverage was run by Bush's first cousin John Ellis.

Also, a quarter of overseas ballots counted (mostly for Bush) were later found to have been wrongly included.

So what did the courts do to prevent this theft? On 9 December when recounts in Florida were fast whittling down the Bush lead to close to zero the Supreme Court (full of Republican appointees) intervened to stop the recount. Why?

According to the ruling, it was halted because to have allowed the recount would have undermined the legitimacy of Bush's office when he was later declared President!

The Republicans, his family and friends in the media and judiciary committed theft just as much as if they had had held up a bank. Tens of millions know it and hate

him for it. He has no democratic mandate and was scorned until 9/11 allowed him to hijack public opinion again.

2 Bush is business' biggest backer

Bush's cabinet is stuffed full of businessmen who have not been elected. Bush's campaign for President was bankrolled by some of the biggest corporations in the world, especially energy firms, including the corrupt and now collapsed Enron.

Big business determines the domestic and foreign policy agenda of the White House. Bush removed restrictions on drilling for oil in Alaska to pay back his oil industry backers. His massive \$300 billion of tax cuts announced last month on share dividends will benefit the top 5 per cent of American people.

Bush is just as keen to push US corporations' interests abroad. By the time Bush came to office the stocks of foreign assets held by US companies was about three times the level of when his father was President - worth \$7.2 trillion.

Exports as a proportion of GDP climbed 50 per cent. Once content to rely mainly on a continental-size national market, major US companies realise that a third, or even a half, of their sales will soon come from abroad.

It is because of this growing dependency on foreign markets that Bush seeks to ensure that no barriers to the trade and investment of US companies abroad are left standing.

The new National Security Strategy (Bush Doctrine) has a whole chapter on pushing free market imperialism on other countries. It insists that "free trade" is a "moral issue". It says that the USA will

confront "nations that close their markets" where "opportunities are hoarded by a privileged few" (i.e. domestic business and consumers). "Policies that strengthen the market" are deemed "relevant for all countries". The document insists that "an end to structural barriers in Europe" (i.e. social welfare and labour rights) is an issue "vital to the national security interest of the USA".

In short, the Bush administration will push on and on with globalisation - the unfettered domination of US corporations in the context of an enforced expansion of free market imperialism.

3 Bush uses the IMF and WTO against the South

Since the second world war, US global economic domination has been underpinned by the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and (since 1995) the World Trade Organisation. Each was organised to ensure that American corporate interests were favoured.

As the biggest donor to the IMF, the US has enough votes in it to veto any measure of which it does not approve. It has enough muscle to push through measures it wants.

The IMF's structural adjustment programmes force Third World governments to qualify for emergency loans by selling off state industries and cutting back on essential education and health programmes in order to generate financial surpluses to pay the interest on private foreign bank loans. In addition, they must open up their domestic economy to foreign multinational goods and investment. This mostly benefits US companies.

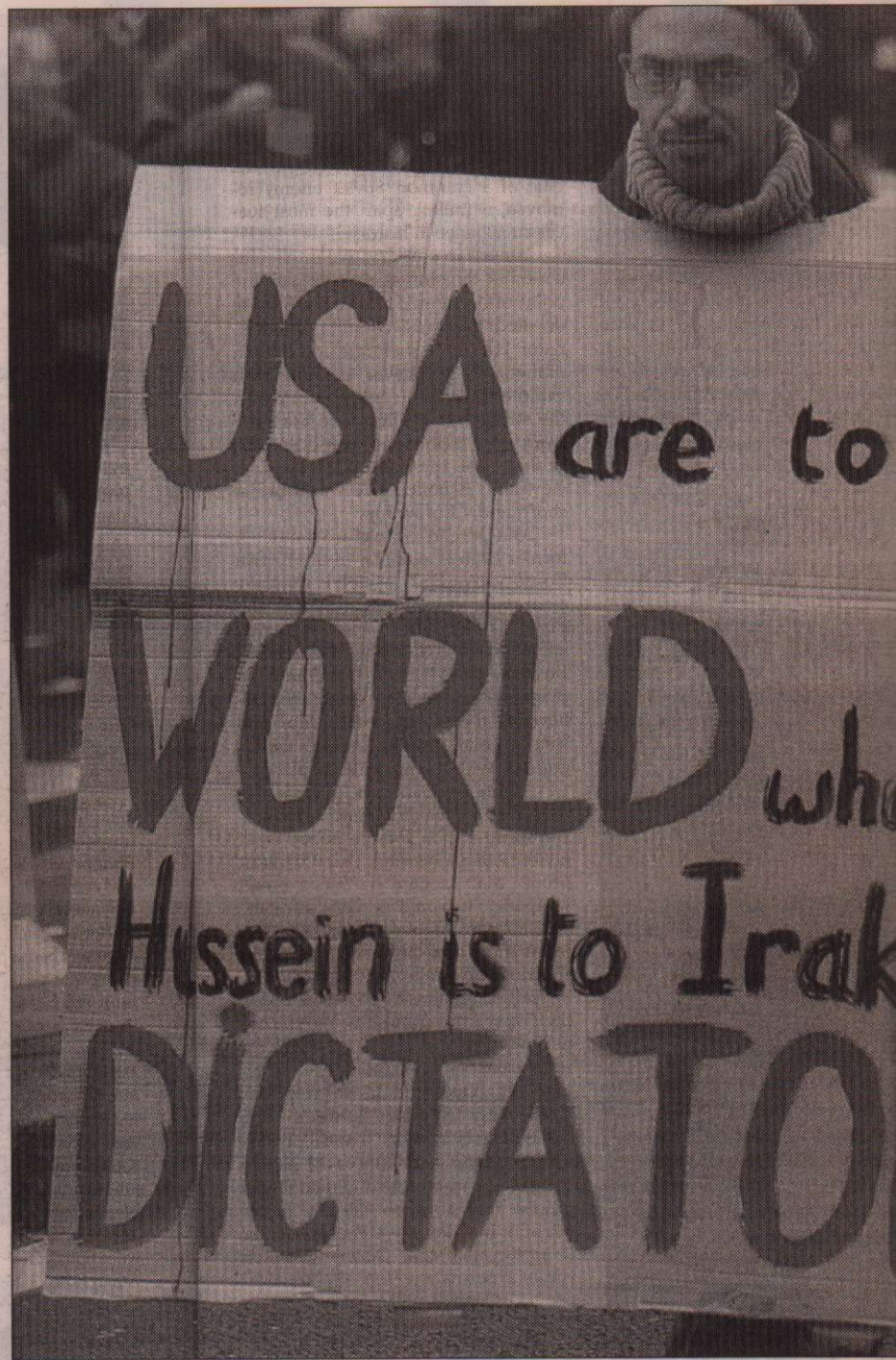
The resulting increase in international commerce - corporate globalisation - led to demands by corporations and investors for ways to defend their privileges and protect them against the perceived danger of governments seizing assets or imposing new regulations.

The WTO was the answer to those demands, an institution whose secret tribunals can overrule national laws if they are found to violate the rights of corporations.

As the US agriculture secretary, John Block, put it in 1986, "(The) idea that developing countries should feed themselves is an anachronism from a bygone era. They could better ensure their food security by relying on US agricultural products, which are available, in most cases at much lower cost."

Or as Walden Bello, has put it, "It was not global necessity that gave birth to the WTO in 1995. It was the USA's assessment that the interests of its corporations were no longer served by a loose and flexible GATT but needed an all-powerful and wide-ranging WTO. From the

Bush has waged war in Afghanistan, is about to launch another one against Iraq, encouraged Israel to crush the Palestinian intifada, stepped up its military support for Colombia's war against the FARC, and colluded in an attempted overthrow of President Chavez of Venezuela. Next stop, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Iran?



free-market paradigm that underpins it, to the rules and regulations set forth in the different agreements that make up the Uruguay round, to its system of decision-making and accountability, the WTO is a blueprint for the global hegemony of corporate America. It seeks to institutionalise the accumulated advantages of US corporations."

4 Bush aims to rule the world - alone

When Bush stole his way into the White House he immediately set about rubbishing international treaties and agencies that the US had agreed to.

The new administration decided that "allies" could either sign up to the US-imperialist agenda or be cast aside.

Bush made it clear that all existing anti-nuclear weapons proliferation treaties were considered redundant. He demanded the removal of the head of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons because he insisted it be allowed to inspect US facilities with the same freedom that Washington applies to the rest of the world - and the head of the international commission on climate change had to go because the US oil companies

called for his removal. Bush refused to sign up to the International Criminal Court since it was not prepared to have its soldiers and citizens abroad held accountable for future war crimes or crimes against humanity. The US gets to decide who is guilty!

In short, Bush made clear that the USA's rulers will not have their hands tied by anything or anyone when pursuing its diplomatic and commercial interests.

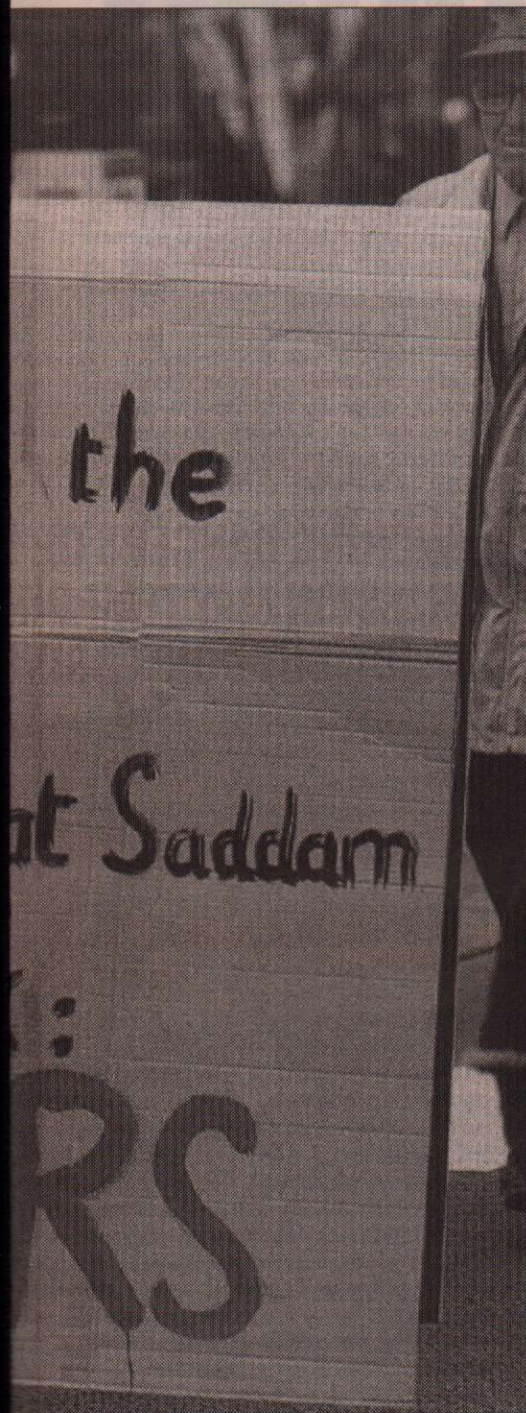
Then came 9/11, since when US imperialism has deepened, broadened and accelerated its reactionary attempt to crush all resistance to the rule of its corporations and its foreign policy objectives.

In its new National Security Strategy document published last year it says the US administration will pursue "our interests at home and abroad by identifying and destroying the threat before it reaches our borders...we will not hesitate to act alone, if necessary, to exercise our right of self-defense by acting pre-emptively against such terrorists."

This Bush doctrine means the US gets to decide whether other countries' elected governments, their economic polices and defence capabilities are a threat to US power and dominance of the world. And if they are then the US can take them out and install puppet regimes that will tow the line.

Already Bush has waged war in

The world hates Bush



Since 9/11 the US has accelerated and consolidated its military grip on the world. Today it has a military presence in 100 of the 180 countries in the world, ranging from a few dozen "advisers" to 14 fully functioning overseas bases. It has established bases in key states in the ex-USSR such as Uzbekistan. It has deployed marines in Georgia to fight Chechens and special forces in the Philippines are hunting down Muslim guerrillas.

The numbers of "advisers" and their role in anti-Farc operations inside Colombia has increased since 9/11.

Bush asked Congress for a further \$1.5 billion to be added to the \$8 billion already set aside for the missile defence system, supposedly operational by next year. When complete and operational it will cost more than \$200 billion.

US Space Command's "Vision for 2020" clearly links the missile defence program to its plans for "dominating the space dimension of military operations" and "integrating space forces into warfighting capabilities."

All this will not make the world "more secure". China has said the programme would make it more likely to step up its nuclear weapons capability.

The US aims to be able to devise a system that threatens the whole world with "we can hit you, but you can't hit us" and hence dictate policies to other countries.

6 Bush supports torture and human rights' abuses

Anywhere in the world, the United States can capture and detain people it claims are terrorists. Those arrested may be completely innocent. These people can be flown to the United States Naval Base, Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and imprisoned for years. They are not accorded the rights of prisoners of war, nor charged with a crime. They do not have access to their families or lawyers.

Some may be tried by a special military commission in secret. If they are found guilty, they may be executed and their bodies disposed of. If found not guilty by the tribunal, even then, secretary of defense Rumsfeld has said that they may not be released.

In March last year, a petition for a writ of habeas corpus was filed on behalf of the detainees in Guantanamo, but the petitioners lost. They lost not because the federal district court decided that what the government is doing is right, but because the court decided it could not even hear the case and determine whether the detentions were legal.

In Guantanamo the current detainees are physically abused. According to one US intelligence source, the detainees are "blindfolded and thrown into walls, bound in painful positions, subjected to loud noises and deprived of sleep."

Since 9/11, dozens of prisoners have been sent to other countries, including Egypt or Jordan, that maintain close ties to the CIA. These people have been transported without going through normal extradition procedures in a process akin to kidnapping. They are sent to Egypt and Jordan where security forces engage in tactics such as torture and threats to families that are illegal in the United States.

As one American official said of this practice of sending captives to foreign countries for interrogation: "We don't kick the

fuck out of them. We send them to other countries so they can kick the fuck out of them."

7 Bush is building a police state

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, the Bush administration launched an onslaught on the civil liberties of US citizens. On 19 September 2001, a terrorism bill was sent to Congress and passed in October as the Patriot Act. Congress voted near unanimously for it. It gave the FBI full powers to intercept e-mails and hugely expanded their ability to search premises without a warrant. The new law allows wider use of undercover agents to infiltrate organisations.

A new crime of "domestic terrorism" came into being. It is loosely defined as "acts that are dangerous to human life". Under this definition, a protest demonstration that blocked a street and prevented an ambulance from passing could be deemed domestic terrorism. Likewise, the demonstrations in Seattle against the WTO could fit within the definition.

The FBI began massive detentions and investigations of individuals "suspected" of terrorist connections in the aftermath of 9/11, almost all of them non-citizens of Middle-Eastern descent. More than 1,100 were arrested. Many were held for days or weeks without access to lawyers or knowledge of the charges against them.

Few, if any, have been proven to have a connection with the 9/11 attacks and some remain in jail despite having been cleared.

Law now permits the "mandatory detention" of aliens certified by the attorney general as "suspected terrorists." These could include people involved in bar room brawls or those who have provided only humanitarian assistance to organisations the United States does not like. Once certified in this way, an alien could be imprisoned indefinitely with no real opportunity for a court challenge.

In addition to the legal clampdown there has been widespread media (self)censorship of information, silencing of dissent, and extensive ethnic and religious profiling of Muslims, Arabs and Asian people. It has created a climate of fear where people are encouraged to suspect their neighbours and people are afraid to speak out.

8 Bush wants to wage a war for oil

A big majority of the French, Russians and Germans believe that the war against Iraq is a war for oil. In 2001, the Middle East generated 30 per cent of world's oil. It contains 65 per cent of world oil reserves and 36 per cent of natural gas reserves.

The USA predicts a 54 per cent increase in its oil consumption by 2020. One Bush backer in Britain has said: "Many critics of US policy towards the region complain that it is largely about oil. One would certainly hope so."

Mike Davis, the US socialist, has said that the Bush cabinet is "the executive committee of the American Petroleum Institute".

The secretary of commerce Don Evans was CEO of Tom Brown Inc, an oil and gas company, and as chief campaign fundraiser for Bush, secured a record \$190 mil-

Top of the Pops in Italy at the moment is a record called Mr President! which says: " Hey! Mr President, we've understood it all/That we are slaves of Wall St, lobbies and multinationals/The taxes of the British people and of the good American people/To exterminate a whole population/To colonise Iraq and the Kurds"

lion for his election - much of it from the oil sector.

National security adviser, Condoleezza Rice, served on Chevron's board of directors and for her pains a 130,000-ton oil tanker was named after her.

Vice-president Dick Cheney was CEO of Halliburton Industries, the largest oil services company in the world. Two subsidiary companies did business with Saddam-Hussein in the 1980s when he was in charge.

In May 2001, Dick Cheney's team drew up a National Energy Plan with help from Enron which noted:

● USA will depend more and more on imports for its oil from 53 per cent now to 65 per cent in 2020.

● USA will need to expand the number of countries it gets its oil from and "overcome resistance to the outward reach of American energy companies" to get it.

Iraq is one obstacle to be overcome. But it also dictates Bush's support for the Colombian government, the right-wing coup plotters among Venezuela's oil industry managers, and the spread of military bases in the Caspian region.

Corruption, greed and hypocrisy are three more reasons the world hates Bush and his administration.

9 Bush is about to kill thousands more Iraqis

On 12 May 1996, the then US ambassador to the United Nations Madeleine Albright was asked on the US television show, *60 Minutes*, about the effect of sanctions on Iraq: "We have heard that a half a million children have died. I mean, that's more children than died in Hiroshima. Is the price worth it?"

Albright replied: "I think this is a very hard choice, but we think the price is worth it."

Under US pressure, the UN Security Council imposed comprehensive economic sanctions against Iraq on 6 August 1990, just four days after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. They have been there ever since as leverage to press for Iraqi disarmament.

The US and UK governments made it clear early on that they would block any lifting of sanctions as long as Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein remains in power. UN agencies such as Unicef have documented the heavy human cost, especially for

children. In 1997, the United Nations Human Rights Committee noted that: "The effect of sanctions and blockades has been to cause suffering and death in Iraq, especially to children."

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights reported in September 2000 that it: "Believes that the current sanctions regime is having a disproportionately negative impact on the enjoyment of human rights by the Iraqi population."

Yet the US and the UK have blocked many proposed reforms.

But the coming war will have an even worse effect. One independent report of medical professionals last November said: "The new war will be much more intense and destructive than the 1990 Gulf War, and will involve more deadly weapons developed in the interim."

Credible estimates of the total possible deaths on all sides during the conflict and the following three months range from 48,000 to more than 260,000. Civil war within Iraq could add another 20,000 deaths. Additional later deaths from post-war adverse health effects could reach 200,000. If nuclear weapons were used, the death toll could reach 3,900,000. In all scenarios the majority of casualties will be civilians and virtually all Iraqis.

10 Bush backs Israel's butchers

Which Middle Eastern country has weapons of mass destruction, has preemptively bombed one of its neighbours, illegally occupies territory of another people and routinely kills innocent opponents of the ruling regime? Israel.

Yet the US does not demand economic sanctions, diplomatic isolation or threaten the country with invasion. Instead it rewards the government with billions of dollars of grants a year.

This is because, as with every other US administration, this one sees Israel as the key to upholding US interests in the Middle East are adhered to. A well-armed and aggressive Zionist state acts to intimidate Israel's oil-rich Arab neighbours and make them comply with US interests.

Bush's money allows Israel to expand illegal settlements, arm it with the very latest military hardware and he refuses to distance the USA from the policy of assassination, collective punishments and mass detentions.

While for the future he claims to support a Palestinian state and claims to want a withdrawal of Israeli troops from areas occupied after September 2000, now he demands that Arafat is replaced by a compliant prime minister, that the CIA and the Israelis be allowed to reconstruct the Palestinian National Authority and police force.

Bush's support for Israel is one of the main reasons why he wants to overthrow Saddam Hussein; forget al-Qaeda, forget WMD, it is about removing one of the main sources of Arab hostility to Israel.

If there is an added dimension to the USA's pro-Zionism under Bush it is this: the right-wing hate all the Arab states for giving the slightest succour to the Palestinians and hence being a point of pressure on Israel to negotiate with the Palestinians. After Iraq is neutralised the White House aim to remove the rulers of Saudi Arabia and any others that may act as brokers for the Palestinians with Israel.

The rise to power of the Butcher of Baghdad

Although Saddam Hussein would dearly love to make history in the months ahead, by defeating the US invaders, the odds are that he is more likely to be history very soon.

A nasty, violent thug he came to prominence in the 1970s when he strengthened and refashioned the armed forces and the repressive security apparatus for the country's President Hassan al-Bakr.

President himself since 1979 he has gassed his own people, launched bloody and unsuccessful invasions of Iran and Kuwait. If it was not for the likely reactionary manner of his passing – at the hands of US troops or coup-plotters – his passing would be a cause for celebration.

But how did he get this far and when did he turn from friend to foe as far as the West was concerned?

Saddam Hussein was born in 1937, in Tikrit Northwest Iraq, to a poor but influential Sunni family. Moving to Baghdad to live with his uncle when 10-years-old, he later became involved in the Arab nationalist movement and joined the Baath Party in 1959 (see box), the year after the Suez Crisis, when Egypt's Nasser successfully fended off Britain, France and Israel's attempts to, seize control of the Suez canal.

In 1958 the Iraqi monarchy was overthrown and a republic formed led by brigadier Abdul Karim Qasim. His regime was perilously balanced between the rising urban middle classes and the poor and working class. He attacked the power of the rich landlords and old aristocracy but wanted to protect indigenous Iraqi capitalists, while giving reforms to the poor.

Critically he established the Iraq National Oil Company (INOC) which limited the concessions for imperialist-owned oil companies to those areas already under production. His balancing act grew ever more untenable and Qasim became increasingly dependent on the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) and in particular its militia.

Allen Dulles the director of the CIA described the situation in Iraq as "the most dangerous in the world." In 1959, following a series of meetings at the US embassy in Cairo, Saddam Hussein led a Baathist assassination attempt on Qasim.

It failed and Saddam fled to Egypt, where in 1960, he was sentenced to death in his absence. Qasim later moved against the ICP. This isolated him from his base of support among the poor and when renewed conflict between Iraq and the Kurds and Iran broke out in February 1963, he was overthrown by a Baathist coup.

Baathism's rule was short lived, however and the government was overthrown by a pro-Egyptian army officer coup in November 1963. Saddam was imprisoned. While in prison he was elected to the Baath Party leadership and became deputy to the Baath leader Bakr in September 1966.

The ruling army officers, however, fell out with Egypt and after their failure to cooperate with the other Arab governments during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, they lost popular support, as did the idea of pan-Arab unity.

In July 1968 the Baathists staged another bloodless coup. Bakr was made president. Saddam was appointed Deputy Chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council. The coup wasn't bloodless for long. The Council launched a ruthless purge of the remaining Nasserite opposition.

The Baathists had made it at last, led

Bill Jenkins explains how Saddam Hussein rose to the top with help from his US friends



Saddam Hussein inspects some his weapons – probably sold to him by the US or UK

by the Tikrit clique of Bakr, Saddam and General Adnan Talfah. They were all related, by marriage and birth and they formed an all powerful leadership group able to break Iraq's cycle of coups and counter coups and establish their uninterrupted rule for the next 35 years.

By 1968 pan-Arab nationalism was dead. The Baathists retained some of its ideological elements, the need to develop the Arab nation and so on, but they were Iraqi nationalists, not Arab ones.

They knew they had to confront the issues that had dogged all Iraqi governments since the establishment of the republic in 1958 – Iraq's relations with the Kurds, the Iranians, the Israelis and the Arab nations. Domestically they needed to offer some reforms to the poor, while developing the

power of the national bourgeoisie and limiting imperialism's control of the Iraqi oil industry. Fortunately, for the Baathists, the 1970s presented them with a unique, although ultimately, short lived opportunity to secure these goals.

The closure of the Suez canal for eight years after the 1967 Arab-Israel war, increased the strategic importance of gulf oil and enabled the Arab nations to demand a greater proportion of oil revenues for themselves. In particular OPEC, originally formed in 1960, but initially too divided to flex its muscles, began to co-operate to raise oil prices. Consequently in 1972 Iraq and the USSR signed a treaty of friendship and co-operation, as an alternative source of arms and finance to develop Iraqi oil fields independently from the US and imperialism.

When Washington loved Saddam

As early as 1963 the CIA helped pave the way for Saddam Hussein's rise to power when they backed the Baathist coup. The CIA provided intelligence including lists of opponents to be assassinated, in return for access to Soviet made MiG fighters and tanks.

But in November Saddam was imprisoned after a pro-Egyptian coup and when the regime proceeded to sign a \$500 million treaty with the USSR in 1966 to develop Iraqi oil fields, US interests were directly threatened.

Robert Anderson the former US Treasury Secretary negotiated with the Baathists, then in opposition, promising them support in return for the oil concessions. Saddam wrote to the US consulate in Basra seeking US help to overthrow the government. Two years later Saddam's party was back in power again.

Nationalisation of the oil industry strained ties between Iraq and the USA in the 1970s as did Washington's refusal to provide Baghdad with the arms it sought. But the Iran-Iraq war in 1980 paved the way for the official restoration of Iraq-US relations.

Saddam had already signalled a rapprochement with the US when he con-

demned the invasion of Afghanistan by the USSR. Closer to home he had launched a murderous campaign against the Iraqi Communist Party.

The US responded with favourable comments about the need to establish warm relations with Saddam Hussein.

Since the Iranian revolution of 1979 Iran was the White House's enemy number one in the region. Khomeini's "anti-imperialist" anti-US message had to be stopped at all costs.

Sixty officers of the Defense Intelligence Agency were deployed to provide detailed satellite information on Iranian deployments, tactical battle planning, air strikes and bomb damage assessments. This included overseeing the use of gas against Iranian troops.

"The use of gas on the battlefield of Iraq was not a matter of deep strategic concern," Col. Walter P Lang a senior defence intelligence officer, commented. The U.S. were "desperate to make sure that Iraq did not lose."

From 1982 onwards the US supplied Iraq with the hardware required to deliver its gas bombs, most importantly 60 Hughes and 45 Bell helicopters.

Donald Rumsfeld the present Vice-President visited Saddam in December 1983.

What is Baathism?

The Baath Party was established in Syria in the 1940s and soon had branches in other Arab countries. It was motivated by Arab nationalism, and was secular.

Its members were predominantly upper-middle class university students. They were hostile to the old landed elite and privileged monarchies that ruled on licence from the main imperialist powers, who controlled their oil wealth.

Saddam was first drawn toward the party in the early 1950 as a teenager. Although he did not join until 1959 he was with thousands of other Baath supporters on the streets of Baghdad in July 1958 when an army officers' coup ousted and then executed King Faisal II and the rest of the royal family.

He had hoped this step would lead the country into fusion with Egypt under Nasser, who, in 1956, had successfully fought off France and Britain and electrified the Arab world. But instead the new government moved into an Arab Union with Jordan with the West's backing, explicitly pitched against the United Arab Republic of Egypt and Syria, then backed by the USSR. In the 1960s each of these countries underwent accelerated separate national capitalist development and ruling classes, with their own interests, developed. Pan-Arab nationalism was dealt a heavy blow when Israel won the 1967 six-day war.

With it Baathism degenerated into the political expression of the Iraqi ruling class' national interest pure and simple.

And in 1973 Iraq nationalised the oil industry in exchange for \$350 million in compensation to the imperialist oil companies. This, combined with rising oil prices throughout the 1970s, massively increased the revenue commanded by the Baathist government and enabled them to implement a reform programme in health care, land redistribution and education which raised living standards and bolstered their regime, and Saddam's position within it.

In 1977 Saddam was elected assistant secretary general of the Baath Party National Command. An ailing Bakr resigned in 1979 and Saddam was formally appointed President in July.

The Iranian Revolution of 1979 reawakened Iraqi claims on the disputed Shatt al Arab waterway. Saddam used the excuse of a

Shiite assassination attempt and rioting and in September 1980 Iraqi troops invaded Iran. Estimates vary widely but the Iraq-Iran conflict killed up to 100,000 Iraqi soldiers with 250,000 wounded. Between 300,000 and 400,000 Iranians died. Iraq lost all its early territorial gains and struggled desperately to remove Iranian forces from Iraqi soil.

Worse, when the 1989 world recession started to bite Iraq was left with an army of over one million men, falling oil revenues and its economy in ruins. The invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, far from being the inevitable consequence of Saddam's regional ambitions, was a desperate attempt to escape the economic consequences of the war and unite the nation behind his leadership.

When he rejected UN demands for his withdrawal the US led a coalition of more than 500,000 troops in a war to drive Iraq out of Kuwait. In February 1992 Operation Desert Storm succeeded, leaving up to 200,000 Iraqis dead.

Today the imperialists talk of this war as having left unfinished business – namely getting rid of Saddam. Yet they had every opportunity to do this last time. His army was defeated and his regime in turmoil. There were risings by Shiites in the south and Kurds in the north.

The US, however, were having none of it. They preferred Saddam in power to an Iraq engulfed in revolution and US troops allowed the remnants of his army to brutally crush the risings and consolidate his central power once again.

US ambitions in the Gulf are driving it towards war with Saddam once again. And this time they do want him gone for good. But we should all remember that this is not "unfinished business". During the Iran-Iraq war the US and Britain backed Saddam. After the 1991 war they effectively helped keep him in power.

Today they want him out. And each time their policy is dictated by their own reactionary interests, by their unquenchable thirst for cheap oil, easy profits and global domination – not by democracy, not by their hatred of a dictator (who they once courted), not by their humanity, of which they have none.

That is why the right to get rid of Saddam Hussein belongs to the Iraqi people, and them alone.

ISRAEL went to the polls last month. The result was never in doubt. Likud, the party of sitting prime minister Ariel Sharon, almost doubled its vote, gaining 37 seats in the parliament, the Knesset.

The Israeli Defence Force "celebrated" by shelling Gaza city, killing 12 Palestinians in the process.

Sharon was re-elected because of his refusal to negotiate with the Palestinian people and his unswerving commitment to Israel's continued murderous onslaught against them.

In March last year Sharon said, "The aim is to increase the number of losses on the other [Palestinian] side. Only after they've been battered will we be able to talk to them". He only wants to talk to a tamed Palestinian leadership which is prepared to collaborate with Israeli security forces and which will settle for a "state" which has no control over its own borders, no army and presides over a territory riddled with Jewish settlements.

Israel's racist war against the Palestinian people has involved:

- A few hundred thousand "settlers" - the vanguard of whom are armed militiamen who believe that the whole of Israel and the Palestinian territories belong exclusively to the Jewish people - have illegally stolen 35 per cent of the West Bank and 40 per cent of the Gaza Strip.

- Soldiers have closed off the cities with "checkpoints" whose only function is to humiliate and stop people from going to work, hospital and school. The Gaza strip has been sealed - no one in or out - like a prison camp for a year.

- Tanks, armoured personnel carriers, specially armoured bulldozers, Apache helicopters and F16 fighter planes regularly destroy Palestinian homes and indiscriminately kill and maim.

If anyone else had committed these atrocities the United States and Britain would be calling on the United Nations to take decisive action. Instead Sharon continues to enjoy George Bush's blessing with billions of dollars in grants and loans, and enough military aid to enable it to maintain the fourth largest army in the world and a nuclear arsenal.

Why? Israel was created in 1947/1948 as a result of a vicious terror campaign, during which hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were ethnically cleansed from their homeland. Since then the country has been a heavily armed outpost for the Western powers, strategically placed on the edge of three continents, right in the heart of the world's biggest oil region. Israel helps the United States especially in intimidating the regional oil-rich Arab states.

But, wherever there is injustice - there's resistance. The Palestinian people have been fighting back heroically, despite all odds.

The latest intifada (uprising) began in September 2000. The papers only report the suicide bombers, as if Israel is forced to reply in kind to these attacks on their civilians. In fact they are the desperate response of a heavily outgunned and constantly repressed Palestinian community, trying to prove to Israel that the Israeli army cannot murder their children with impunity.

Not surprisingly, the anti-war movement around the world has adopted the Palestinian struggle as its own. Wherever people march against the war, they also voice their belief that there must be justice for the Palestinian people for there to be peace in the Middle East.

As the world's press focuses on Iraq, the Palestinian people are being slowly strangled by the Israeli occupation. *Jeremy Dewar* and *Mark Robbins* visited the Occupied Territories as part of a solidarity delegation. This is what they found

Nablus: target of Israel's ethnic cleansing drive

By *Jeremy Dewar*

My first impression of Nablus was Hawara, one of several checkpoints that surround the city. There was a huge queue. Most had doctor's notes. Some had UN work permits. But the Israeli soldiers were not allowing anyone through except the old and the sick. Even then they were selective.

Taking our cue from more experienced activists, we tried to help those who seemed particularly in need to get the soldiers' attention. This might be successful for a few as some soldiers were more co-operative than others. But at times the soldiers would become extremely aggressive towards us. Three or four hours waiting time was normal.

After a few hours, some other activists came to relieve us. We walked into Balata refugee camp to dump our bags and awaited further requests. One came straight away.

Another checkpoint, as-Masood, was at a complete standstill and there were no internationals there to help. We jumped in a taxi and took an amazing ride, including cutting through a bombed-out building. The driver left us just short of the checkpoint - no drivers will take you within sight of the soldiers for fear of having their ID stolen, their keys taken or even being arrested.

About 12 female students were unable to return to their

village, Samal, after attending university. The students were in the middle of exams. We forced the soldiers to allow three or four men to pass but not the students. These were later joined by another 25.

The students had to stay overnight on floors in town. The students had exams at 8.00am, but this was precisely the point - they are being denied the right to education.

The next morning we decided to unblock a road, which the army had blocked, cutting off part of the city.

Armed with shovels, picks and spades we set off in a series of taxis. At the road block we commenced our work. To speed things up we worked in rotation and within a couple of hours we were ready for a test run. The car passed easily and we knew we had achieved a small breach of the occupation.

By this time we had attracted the attention of the shebab - the local kids from the school nearby. The locals were very appreciative of our work and thanked us - in fact, later that week, Palestinians started taking down roadblocks themselves and even got hold of a JCB digger to speed things up.

After the action we made our way to Yanoun, a village about ten miles from Nablus. Beautifully set in a valley, surrounded by gentle hills, Yanoun is about sheep, olives... and settlers.

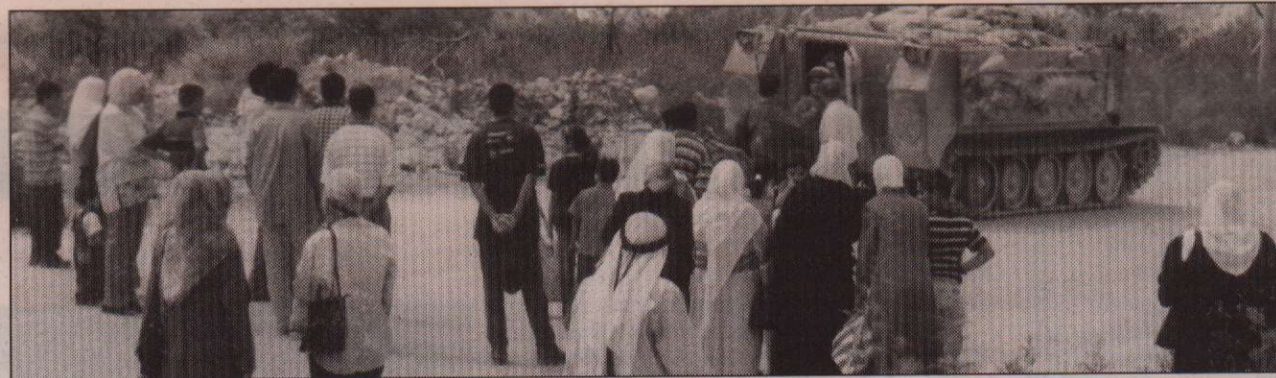
Five years ago settlers from Atamar started to build outposts on the hills overlooking Yanoun. A watchtower scans the village with a searchlight every evening. Part of our job in Yanoun was to collect the stories of settler violence as told by the villagers.

Yanoun used to have 500 inhabitants. Now just 90 remain, the rest having been frightened off by a series of beatings, shootings and destruction. The settlers at the outpost have been identified as members of the fascist Kach party. Their methods of ethnic cleansing are brutally effective.

We were told how they threw excrement into the village well and burnt out the generator - Yanoun is not connected to the mains. Villagers have been beaten and shot at while tending their sheep or working the fields. One villager, Hani, had his house blown up by the army because it had been built "illegally". Meanwhile the whole illegal Zionist settlement is allowed to build wherever it wants.

One by one these villages, which make up the heart of Palestine, its culture and economy, are being wiped out. The Palestinians call it "slow transfer" using small bands of fascists to terrorise farmers into leaving.

The ISM wants to keep a permanent presence in Yanoun to prevent another piece of Palestine disappearing off the map.



Rafah: amid the daily trickle of deaths

By *Mark Robbins*

Rafah is a tiny, overcrowded and impoverished town in the Gaza Strip on the border with Egypt - an open-air prison camp within an open-air prison camp.

The day we arrived, yet another checkpoint cut it off from the rest of the Gaza Strip because a few settlers had decided to go for a drive - leaving several hundred people waiting for hours in their vehicles under the sun before they could get in or out.

Our job was to stay in the houses of families whose homes were at risk of demolition. The Israeli army is trying to create a buffer zone along the border where tanks can move freely and blow up houses in the small hours of the morning when people are least likely to resist. These are people who are accused of no crime apart from living somewhere inconvenient for the tanks. Where they are expected to go when their homes and belongings disappear in a cloud of smoke is evidently of no concern. Nearby, there is a Palestinian village called Mawasi, cut off from the coast by a newly-built ille-

gal settlement, and surrounded on the other side by a military installation. The only two ways out of the village are towards Egypt (routinely closed for "security" reasons), or through a checkpoint towards Rafah.

This checkpoint is opened two or three times a day only to the Palestinians who work on the settlement - the Palestinian villagers who actually live there find it a nightmare to get out and practically impossible to get back in again. We tried to get some much-needed medical supplies for the villagers through the checkpoint, only to see them confiscated by the Israeli secret police.

A stone's throw away, there is a water treatment facility located next to a sewage plant and a huge rubbish dump. The sewage is leaking into the ground water, and the contractors hired to make the necessary repairs kept getting shot at from a nearby observation post - the same one that surrounds the isolated village.

They managed to get the repairs done only because we spent several days standing guard. Palestinians are fair game, but

the army knows that shooting Westerners might cause a diplomatic incident.

The army blew up 10 buildings on my second day in Rafah, and another five the day I left. The month I was in the country, around 50 Palestinians had been killed by the Israeli security forces and settlers - the vast majority unarmed civilians - while there were almost no Israeli casualties.

The relatives of the dead, the families made homeless overnight, the conscript soldiers ordered to go about this grim business, the career officers and politicians who put them there and every ordinary Israeli in Tel Aviv must have braced themselves for the inevitable revenge. It came two days after I left Rafah, the same day that I arrived in Tel Aviv. A double suicide-bombing in the central bus station killed 22 people - most of them impoverished foreign guest workers and almost all of them civilians. The world media took notice of the sudden deaths of Israelis, but very little notice of the daily trickle of Palestinian deaths that preceded it.

Support the International Solidarity Movement

The comrades who wrote these reports were in Palestine as part of the International Solidarity Movement (ISM). This is a Palestinian-led movement of Palestinian and international activists that has been working to help end the Israeli occupation on the ground since August 2001.

ISM activists were the first to start documenting the human rights abuses perpetrated against Palestinians through interviews and documentation of destruction.

The ISM recognises the Palestinians' right to resist Israeli violence and occupation through armed struggle. But the activists themselves use non-violent, direct-action methods of resistance to confront and challenge illegal Israeli occupation forces and policies.

Working in affinity groups of 5-12, hundreds of activists from all over the world have gone to Palestine for days, weeks or months to do the job that the United Nations has abdicated. Some activists have been shot, others beaten and threatened.

In Britain the Foreign Office shows no sympathy or support for the ISM actions, suggesting that they should stay away from the area. We take a different view and recognise the importance of the material support the ISM is giving to the Palestinians' just struggle.

World Social Forum gathers in

More than 100,000 people went to the third World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil, to discuss resistance to the war on Iraq and how to fight globalisation. *Dave Stockton*, of the European Social Forum mobilising committee looks at what it achieved

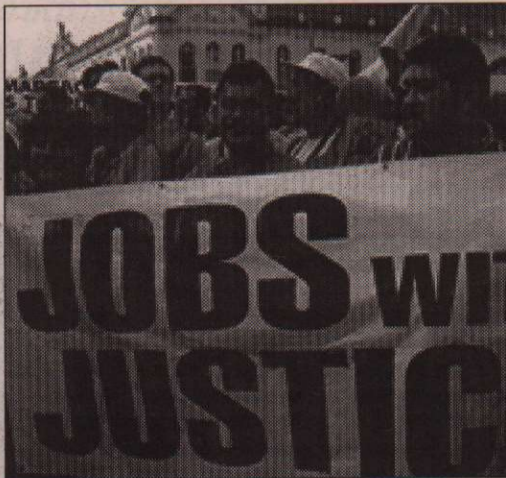
Colourful banners, giant puppets, drummers, samba bands, dancers and songs on the streets of Brazil. No, not Carnival in Rio but the third World Social Forum (WSF) in Porto Alegre last month.

The message being chanted, sung, rapped and drummed was one of resistance to global capitalism and the impending war against Iraq by the USA and Britain.

During the past three years the numbers attending have more than doubled every year; 20,000 in 2001, 50,000 in 2002, and over 100,000 in 2003. So too has the range of countries from which people came. To start off with it was very much a Latin American and European affair (mainly French and Italian). This time it was truly global.

In the last three months, regional Social Forums took place in Europe, Asia and Africa. The European Social Forum in Florence, in November, attracted 60,000 who took part in debates and on its concluding day, at its call, one million demonstrated against war. In early January 25,000 attended the Asian Social Forum in Hyderabad, India.

During 22-28 January Porto Alegre was



Demonstrators at Porto Alegre

bursting at the seams. Every conceivable public space - sports stadiums, empty warehouses in the dockyards as well as all the city's colleges and universities resounded to discussions and debates.

A resolution approved by the delegates on



the second day of the meeting called on the 15 member states of the UN Security Council to use their power to prevent a war against Iraq. The resolution declares that they are opposed to the new world order under which the United States seeks to impose its "preventive war"

doctrine and the statement considered that preventing war through joint actions with social movements as "an issue of the utmost importance."

It also suggested that the UN arms inspectors should be given enough time to complete their job.

This appeal to the predators to go vegetarian sows dangerous illusions in the United Nations, even the Security Council - the thieves' kitchen par excellence. The problem is that if and when the USA twists enough arms and fills enough pockets to get a new resolution allowing it to attack Iraq then all the world's people who thought UN approval was the critical issue will subside in confusion, even if they still resent the war.

Pinning hopes on the UN is an example of short-sighted opportunism. The WSF should be warning, preparing and educating millions that the UN is as much a part of the imperialist system as the White House that controls its key appointments and proposals.

One good idea the WSF did come up with is that each country's social forums will send delegations to Iraq in the coming weeks, in an

The global challenge of the anti-capitalist

The anti-capitalist movement announced its arrival as a mass radical international force on the streets of Seattle in November 1999. "Teamsters and Turtles Together" - unionised truck-drivers and campaigners for the environment - came to protest against a common enemy, the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

All there recognised that global capitalism underpinned all their concerns: the new free trade zones, the crippling repayments on the third world debt, the whole raft of "pro-market" policies, pushed by the International Monetary Fund, privatisation, cuts in state spending on health and education.

Trade unionists, environmental campaigners, anti-debt campaigners, anti-racist fighters, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) joined up with anarchists and socialists to insist that "another world is possible".

In 2000 and 2001, on the streets of Prague, Melbourne, Quebec and Genoa this new movement, increasingly calling itself anti-capitalist, confronted and besieged the gatherings of the great and powerful.

But the backlash from the billionaires and their state forces was not long in coming. In the summer of 2001, two anti-capitalist mobilisations were repressed. In Gothenburg, three demonstrators against a European Union leadership summit were shot and dozens were injured. In Genoa, a young protester, Carlo Giuliani, was gunned down by the police and hundreds were gassed, clubbed and hospitalised.

But the movement did not die. It was not demoralised. On the contrary in Genoa and across Italy workers struck and joined students on the streets in hundreds of thousands. In town and cities they created social forums with trade unions, political parties,

single issue campaigns to mobilise the fightback.

The attacks on New York and Washington on 9/11 were used by the governments to smear and persecute the movement. But when Bush declared his "endless war" on terrorism and attacked Afghanistan the movement developed into an anti-war movement too. The mobilisations gathered momentum - in Barcelona, Seville, London and New York.

Nor was it only a question of tear gas and street fighting. At each of these mobilisations and counter-conferences corporate capitalism has found itself under sustained attack from ideas that are dynamite. Capitalism, globalisation, the market were not inevitable, nor are they eternal: "another world is possible!"

In January 2001, the first World Social Forum (WSF) was held in Porto Alegre. Its declared purpose was to try to bring a greater unity of objectives to this very diverse movement. The initiators of this project were the Brazilian Workers Party (PT), which has run the city government of Porto Alegre for 12 years; the main Brazilian trade union federation, the CUT; and the Movement of Landless Workers (MST); plus the Brazilian council NGOs.

Outside of Brazil it was a series of "think tanks" and campaigns that joined up to organise the WSF. First among these was the French-based international organisation Attac (Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions for the Benefit of Citizens), launched in 1998 by the editorial staff of the prestigious Paris monthly *Le Monde Diplomatique*.

Italians around *Riformazione Comunista* and the many social movements in that country also played an important role. These were joined by the World March of Women and *Pace e Giustizia* in the United States.

These organisations together form the core of an International Council of the WSF that takes all the major decisions. This council was not elected by a representative, democratic conference and its deliberations are shadowy to say the least. It adopted a series of principles after the first WSF, which have since been imposed as a basis for the regional social forums. These ban the open participation of political parties or adoption of resolutions by voting.

The format of the WSF is a series of huge conferences or assemblies whose programme is fixed by an International Council. These are debates between big name speakers that privilege the functionaries of the big NGOs, the trade union leaders, journalists, academics and think-tank intellectuals rather than the young activists from the streets and the workplaces who have built up this movement.

As a result the message coming out from the main forums is the need for reform of the system of global capitalism rather than for a revolutionary assault on it. The question American activists posed, "nix it or fix it?" has been answered by Attac leaders like Susan George and Ignacio Ramonet: "definitely fix it".

Thus after Porto Alegre, Ignacio Ramonet said the results of this year's forum discussions will be presented as practical proposals to be sent to governments, NGOs, political parties and trade unions. As if it is these bodies that will implement these schemes for reform!

At the same time the organisers kept the more radical or controversial figures such as Venezuela's embattled president Hugo Chavez well away from the "official" WSF podiums. They also refused an official invitation to Hebe de Bonafini, a leader of the *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* - the organisation formed by mothers of those



Protesters at Davos. NGOs however went cap in hand to big banks and imperialist states.

who were "disappeared" by the Argentine Army in the "dirty war" of the 1970s.

The organisers, she claimed, had excluded her because they regarded the *Madres* as defenders of terrorists. "We are revolutionaries just as our children were", she said proudly. Bonafini stated that the leadership of the WSF was obviously in the wrong hands, those already living in "another world" to that of the poor and exploited. "If the WSF is not to die then we must put it into the hands of those who are fighting for an alternative socialist world", she said. Exactly!

The official WSF it seems has no place for the real struggles of the continent: the *Madres*, or for the Argentine unemployed piqueteros and factory occupations; the Colombian fighters against the USA, creeping occupation of their country under the name of the "war on drugs" and the "war on terrorism"; the Bolivian cocaleros (coca growers), 11 of whom were gunned down in recent demonstrations.

Nevertheless, the great mass of people at Porto Alegre, youth, trade unionists, landless peasants, native peoples' activists,

ecologists, are far more radical, indeed revolutionary, than the "official" representatives. They flooded the self-organised workshops and the youth camp that this year attracted 30,000 people. This enormous radical "fringe" was the scene of many lively debates. The problem is that there is no way these can seriously influence the official leaders who form an impervious layer of bureaucracy.

The gulf that divides the two can be seen in the two journeys travelled by Brazil's new President Lula; the first from working-class poverty to high office and the second from Porto Alegre to Davos to attend the global bosses' gab-fest in their mountain retreat.

Once stigmatised by the world's millionaire media as a Marxist, for years a militant car workers' leader and fighter for democracy against the military dictatorship, Lula was congratulated by the mandarins of world capitalism at the World Economic Forum in Davos. Why?

Lula has been given a clean bill of political health from Anne Krueger, deputy head of the International Monetary Fund

Porto Alegre

expression of solidarity with the Iraqi people and in opposition to the international embargo imposed on the nation.

The WSF also urged an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. This call must be backed up with action to obstruct the war - strikes, boycotts, all forms of direct action, and to punish the imperialist warmongers by attacking their corporate and state interests and investments. That would be a real step forward.

At the World Social Forum, a WSF International Council announced changes for the next event. Its fourth assembly will take place in India in March 2004. There are proposals to constitute a secretariat and a "network of social movements". Unfortunately, these issues have not been discussed at the base of the movement - among

the real anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist activists from the streets.

As with the ESF in Florence, the masses of workers and peasants, those from the youth camp must displace the reformist bureaucrats and bourgeois intellectuals who have established an unelected and

undemocratic control of the central organs of the movement.

Great opportunities and hopes exist for this movement, but great dangers too, unless a powerful and active democracy is built up on every continent, in every country, in every town and city. That is why we need social forums pledged

to action as well as discussion at all these levels and a series of co-ordinations based on elected and recallable delegates, not the self-selected representatives of the NGOs, intellectual think-tanks or trade union bureaucrats.

Great opportunities and hopes exist for this movement, but great dangers too, unless a powerful and active democracy is built up on every continent, in every country, in every town and city

alist movement

because he has promised to continue to pay Brazil's monstrous external debt, to continue negotiating the treaties that will set up the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), and has appointed a "market-friendly" finance minister and central bank chief. Krueger said that the new government's declared commitment to "fiscal and monetary discipline" was "a big step forward."

The "alternative worlds" being proposed by Lula today - and backed by the WSF's organisers for whom he is their guiding inspiration - is no alternative at all. If they cannot say NO to payment of the debt, if they cannot say NO to the FTAA, if they cannot say YES to land for all the members of the MST then what Lula represents is not the anti-capitalist movement but a Brazilian version of Tony Blair's Third Way.

When Lula announced to an adoring crowd that he would not be part of the discussions in Porto Alegre but of those in Davos the chants of "Lula! Lula! Lula!" fell deathly silent and the waving of PT banners stopped.

Of course, he said, he would "deliver a message on behalf of the poor". But as Joao Pedro Stedile, leader of the Landless Workers Movement (MST), pointed out. "The WSF was born to oppose Davos and not believe that a coalition of businessmen and capitalists has any interest in changing the world."

For those, not only in Brazil but around the world, who believe that "Lula is OUR president" as the saying goes - wake up and smell the coffee!

The workers and the landless need to seize the huge estates of the big landowners and the industries owned by multinational corporations. In a word, a revolution which destroys the armed centres of capitalist power and replaces them with the

democratic, inclusive organisations of the people in struggle.

The view that the anti-capitalist movement must keep clear of the question of power is one propagated both by anarchists on the left and by the liberal NGOs, on the right of the movement, albeit for very different reasons. The former because they cannot work out how to wring any concessions (reforms, democratic rights) from the capitalist state while it still exists. The latter because they are the charitable agents of the state, patching up the system at minimal cost.

That is why many NGOs were present in Davos going cap in hand to the "movers and shakers" of the corporate giants and the imperialist superstates, pleading with them to give more to the poor. That too was why Lula was there, calling for charity from the leaders of the first world to the poor of the third.

The right wing, reformist grip on the anti-capitalist movement can only be broken by a massive strengthening and extending of the mass movement.

Every country should build a network of local social forums - drawing in the unions and all the other campaigning bodies. Here action can be planned, tactics and a programme of action discussed. From these bodies mandated and accountable delegates can be sent to national and international bodies in proportion to the support for the differing viewpoints. "This is what democracy looks like!"

Revolutionary socialists are convinced that given enough of such struggle-based democracy a mass new international political organisation can be built to take on and defeat the capitalist globalisers. This is the message we must take into the European Social Forum in Paris in November, and into next WSF in 2004.

Get active, stay active join Workers Power

Workers Power is one of the most dynamic socialist organisations in Britain.

As our name suggests, we want a complete change in society. Instead of a world ruled by the rich, we want the working class majority to take control.

Blair and Prescott say there's no such thing as class anymore and that "we're all middle class now". But that's just New Labour spin. Their own actions prove that society is still divided into classes. They can find billions to bomb Iraq for the big oil companies, but they won't pay the firefighters a decent wage. They put the rich before the rest of us every time.

The overwhelming majority of people are working class. We're not only in factories but also in offices, schools, shops and depots everywhere. We do the work - but capitalists make all the decisions and own all the profits.

If you join Workers Power, you are agreeing to work together in a team with other people who hate capitalism and want to overthrow it. Your chosen methods will be neither peaceful constitutional change nor futile acts of terrorism, but building a mass movement fighting for the power to change the basis of society.

We fight in the workplaces, on the streets and in the mass organisations and campaigns of the working class. Our members have leading positions in the National Stop the War Coalition, the trade unions and support groups for strikers like the firefighters. We also have members on the leading bodies of the Socialist Alliance and the Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers. We support the youth group REVOLUTION, which organises protest action against sweatshops, warmongers and corporate control.

In every campaign or union, Workers Power members fight for the working class movement to break its ties with the capitalists and to organise to take power itself. We call on the unions to stop paying millions to Blair's New Labour and set up a New Working Class Party instead. We try to link all the separate campaigns together - Workers Power members are pushing for the setting up of Social Forums in every city, like they have in Italy, to unite our struggles into one big working class force.

We support demands for higher pay, shorter working hours and better conditions. We oppose privatisation and believe that all major industries and services should be owned by society as a whole. They should be under the democratic control and management of the workforce and service users (workers' control), not private millionaires and their unaccountable managers.

We believe that under capitalism Britain is deeply undemocratic - parliament is elected only every five years and government is controlled behind the scenes by unelected civil servants, special advisers and boardroom executives. We don't even get a vote on whether to go to war. Instead, we want a Workers' Government, accountable to mass assemblies and councils of ordinary people, so that we can take back control of our own lives and break the control of the rich.

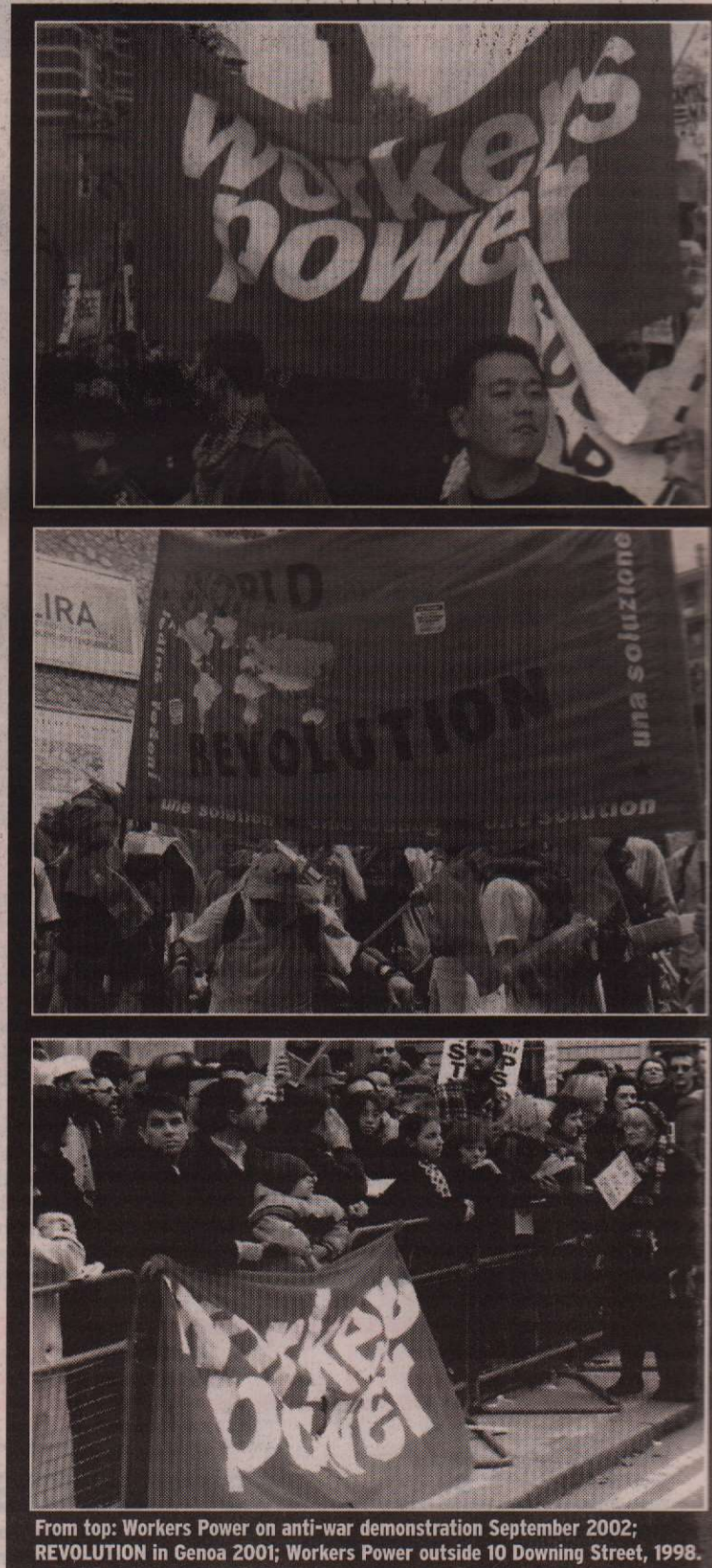
In a society owned and controlled by the working class, things could be produced and distributed according to a democratic plan. Modern technology and the Internet would make this easier than ever before. Instead of a market economy, in which jobs, living standards, health and the environment are all sacrificed for profit, the economy would be rational, based on meeting people's needs. After a few decades of democratic planning, the division of society into classes would start to disappear. We would have a genuinely communist system. It wouldn't be heaven overnight - but it would be an alternative to the inequality and exploitation that is tearing the world apart today.

Workers Power is the British section of an organisation called the League for a Revolutionary Communist International (LRCI). The LRCI has members in Sweden, France, Ireland, Germany, Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Ukraine, Italy and Australia, as well as in Britain. This means we can co-ordinate international action. We have taken a full part in the big protests against global capitalism that have rocked cities all over the world over the last three years, including in Prague, Gothenburg, Nice, Genoa and Florence.

Across the globe the working class is coming together. Globalisation has forced workers and activists from different countries and continents to unite, work and fight together. There have been huge Social Forums of resistance in Europe at Florence, in Asia at Hyderabad and in South America at Porto Alegre. Together with the LRCI, which is represented on the European Social Forum, Workers Power campaigns to bring these movements together into a New World Party of Socialist Revolution (a "New International").

This is a momentous time, one of those times when the true nature of the world we live in suddenly becomes clear to millions. Capitalism is revealing itself to be a system of war, conquest and global inequality. By taking to the streets against the war, hundreds of thousands of people are showing that they have seen through the lies.

Take the next step and join Workers Power. Phone us on 020 7820 1363 or e mail us at paper@workerspower.com.



From top: Workers Power on anti-war demonstration September 2002; REVOLUTION in Genoa 2001; Workers Power outside 10 Downing Street, 1998.

workers power

DON'T ATTACK IRAQ

Demonstrate: Saturday 15 February 2003, London
Assemble: Embankment or Gower Street 12 noon

Called by the Stop the War Coalition. Details 020 7053 2155/6 or e-mail www.stopwar.org.uk

AS MILLIONS OPPOSE BLAIR'S WAR AND BACK THE FIREFIGHTERS

It's time for a new workers' party

Tony Blair is declaring war – not on poverty and injustice, but on the starving Iraqi people and the heroic British firefighters.

He was elected to govern "for the many, not the few". But he is ruling for a small but powerful minority, for George W Bush, the big oil companies and billionaire businessmen.

So why are our trade unions paying millions of pounds a year to Blair and his party?

The Labour Party was founded by the trade unions to defend the interests of working class people. But Blair and Prescott are acting for the capitalists instead – at home and abroad, they are attacking the working class.

In a matter of weeks, Tony Blair will unleash a quarter of the British Army on Iraq. Not because of Saddam Hussein – after all the British and Americans armed him and funded him, even when he was gassing his own citizens. No – Blair is going to murder Iraqi civilians to capture their oil for Exxon, Mobil and his extra-close friends in BP. Instead of the ethical foreign policy he once promised, Blair is slavishly backing the USA as it bombs and blasts its way to global domination.

At home the firefighters are on strike for £8.50 an hour. Blair, on a six-figure salary like his rich friends, says this is "too much". John Prescott – who once posed as the unions' closest ally in the government – has launched an all-out attack on the fire service (the Bain report) involving cuts, closure of stations, loss of jobs and harsh working conditions.

When the FBU said "No" to Bain and re-launched their strikes, Prescott announced laws to take control of the fire service and take away the union's right to negotiate for its members.

No wonder that whenever you go to an FBU picket line every firefighter you talk to says: 55,000 firefighters and their families voted Labour in 2001, but they never will again.

Labour's attack on the FBU is an attack on the whole working class. Its goal is to break the strength of public sector unions so that Blair's privatisation plans – PFI and PPP – can be pushed through not only in the fire service, but in schools and hospitals too.

It is a crime that our union leaders are paying the Labour Party millions of pounds a year for this. No won-



Blair and his clique who control the Labour party attack the anti-war demonstrators and the firefighters

der at this year's union conferences there are more resolutions than ever before demanding that the political funds of affiliated unions be run democratically so that members can stop paying millions to Blair and his pro-capitalist party.

Blair will not tolerate dissent inside the Labour Party. He will try to silence or even fling out MPs who oppose the war with Iraq. All the more reason why anyone in the Labour Party who hates what Blair is doing should speak out openly now. They will win massive support across the country – not from MPs and politicians – but from the tens of millions who oppose the war and support the firefighters.

But there is no hope of anti-war and pro-working class members taking over Labour – the machinery is controlled completely by Blair and his pro-business clique.

Instead every working class organisation needs to come together and set up a new workers' party – one that fights for working people with the same single-minded determination with which Blair fights for the rich.

Today there are hundreds of thousands of anti-war and anti-capitalist activists who want to struggle but would not join Blair's party in a million years. There are thousands of firefighters and other trade unionists who don't want to fund New Labour for a minute longer. There are millions of council tenants, students and pensioners itching to back an alternative to Labour.

A new workers' party could become a mass force in no time. It would need money and resources – full-time workers, headquarters in every town, a paper, a printing press, leaflets putting the case for a new party. The

good news is that these resources are available – right now. Our trade unions are talking about helping Labour, over the next three years, to the tune of £40 million. That's £40 million for war, privatisation, tuition fees union busting and racism. Talk about good money going after bad.

The unions must put a stop to it. Not a penny should go to New Labour. Instead the unions should throw themselves into the campaign for a new party.

In every workplace, every town and city, on every estate, everyone who supports a new workers' party should come together. Unions, anti-war groups, dissident local Labour parties, left-wing groups like the Socialist Alliance and Scottish Socialist Party, anti-racist and community campaigns – we should all link up nationally to kick-start a drive to set up a new workers' party. We call on the anti-war and pro-FBU Labour MPs to take up this call now and help build a new party as an alternative to the warmongers and the union busters.

Unlike Blair's regime of total control, the new party should be democratic, so working people can speak out for their concerns and shape its policies. It should adopt a socialist programme, not for the piecemeal reform of capitalism but to overthrow it altogether. That way it could end the vicious cycle that 100 years of Labour governments have given us – high hopes followed by shattered dreams.

Instead a new workers' party could open the road to lasting peace, by waging war on the warmongers. It could win social justice and equality by taking power away from the capitalists and putting it in the hands of the working class. It could abolish production for profit and greed, and replace it with a democratically planned economy that meets the everyday needs of millions of people. It could make another world possible – socialism.

With hundreds of thousands on the streets against Blair's war and millions backing the firefighters, there has never been a better time to launch a real alternative to Blair and Labour. If we all take up the call, we can make it happen.

Union members and leaders, socialists in the Labour Party, break with Blair... Build a new workers' party!

www.workerspower.com

Workers Power is the British Section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International

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